1-1-1987

General rule in the philosophy of David Hume.

Marie Ann Martin
University of Massachusetts Amherst

GENERAL RULE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DAVID HUME

A Dissertation Presented

By

MARIE ANN MARTIN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1987

Philosophy

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By

MARIE ANN MARTIN

Approved as to style and content by:

Bruce A. Aune, Chairman of Committee

Vere C. Chappell, Member

Gareth B. Matthews, Member

William E. Naff, Member

Michael Jubien, Department Head

ABSTRACT

General Rules in the Philosophy of David Hume

(February 1987)

Marie Ann Martin, B.A., Brandeis University

M.A., Northern Illinois University

Ph.D., University of Massachusetts

Directed by: Professor Bruce A. Aune

Hume refers to general rules throughout the three books of the Treatise. It is clear that these rules play an important role, for him, in the formation of both causal and moral judgments, and in the genesis or direction of the passions. Also, his theory of justice is based on an elaborate hierarchy of general rules. Yet, in spite of the pervasive presence of general rules in his philosophy, he never offers a detailed analysis of their nature and their contribution the human understanding. Fortunately, when his various references to general rules and scattered remarks about them are pieced together, one has an ample basis for constructing a coherent and unified account of their nature and the role they play in the interlocking theories that Hume develops in the Treatise. My principal aim in this work is to construct such an account. In doing so, I try to show how Hume's views on general rules provide important insights into a number of aspects of his philosophy, particularly his naturalism, his views on rational method, and his skepticism.

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INTRODUCTION

Hume refers to general rules throughout the three books of the Treatise. It is clear that these rules play an important regulative role, for him, in the formation of both causal and moral judgments, and in the genesis or direction of the passions. Also, his theory of justice is based on an elaborate hierarchy of general rules. Yet, in spite of the pervasive presence of general rules in his philosophy, he never offers a detailed analysis of their nature and their contribution to the human understanding. Fortunately, when his various references to general rules and scattered remarks about them are pieced together, one has an ample basis for constructing a coherent and unified account of their nature and the role they play in the interlocking theories that Hume develops in the Treatise. My principal aim in what follows is to construct such an account. In doing so, I try to show how Hume's views on general rules provide important insights into a number of aspects of his philosophy, particularly his naturalism, his views on reason and rational method, and his skepticism.

To provide the basic background material necessary to appreciate the specific function of general rules in the Treatise, I begin with a general discussion of the distinctive features of Hume's theory of the understanding. This preliminary discussion will constitute Chapter I. In Chap-

ter II, I provide a detailed analysis of the structure and formation of the general rules associated (in Hume's view) with causal judgment. In Chapter III, I discuss the justification of general rules and its relation to Hume's skepticism "with regard to reason". Finally, in Chapters IV and V, I examine the role of general rules in three other areas of Hume's philosophy: the passions, morals, and the theory of justice.

C H A P T E R I

HUME ON THE UNDERSTANDING

In a work on Hume's theory of general rules, a chapter devoted to Hume's theory of the understanding requires some explanation. Apart from the general benefits of viewing particular aspects of a philosopher's work in light of a more comprehensive framework, I have two more specific reasons for approaching the topic in this manner. First, the formation and functioning of general rules depends on the various mechanisms detailed in Hume's discussion of judgment, belief, imagination, and custom. Thus, it is impossible to explain the operation of general rules without first explaining these features of Hume's theory of the understanding. Yet simply understanding how general rules operate does not help us to understand the important role of general rules in Hume's philosophy. Thus, my second reason for devoting a chapter to the discussion of the basic elements of Hume's theory of the understanding is to provide the background material necessary for understanding and for appreciating the importance of this role.

Judgment

Hume's view of the understanding is, in part, a development of the Cartesian or, more specifically, the Male-

branchian theory of natural judgments. According to the Cartesians, natural judgments depend entirely on human physiology. As they saw it, such judgments supply only very limited truths about objects, indicating at best the relation of objects to our bodies. Their general view was that, to enable us to preserve our bodies, God fashioned us with the ability to make natural judgments about things in our immediate environment. Our knowledge of the real nature of these things is not derived, they thought, from our natural judgments; it is attained by the intellect or pure understanding. According to Descartes, the ideas of the intellect are innate; according to Malebranche, they are ideal archetypes in the mind of God, which our pure understanding directly apprehends. In either case our natural judgments are regulated and corrected by these "intellectual" ideas.

Hume's account of the understanding differs from these views i dispensing entirely with the faculty of the pure understanding or intellect. According to him, we possess no such faculty. His conviction on this point leaves him with the task of providing an alternative explanation of how we are able to regulate and correct those low-level judgments that the Cartesians termed "natural". He aimed to accomplish this task in a thoroughly naturalistic way; the key elements in the mechanism he described were general rules.

Although Hume continued to speak of judgments, he rejected the received view of them expounded in the Port Royal

Logic.[1] He described that view as dividing the "acts of the understanding into conception, judgment and reasoning":

> Conception is defin'd to be the simple survey of one or more ideas: Judgment to be the separating or uniting of different ideas: Reasoning to be the separating or uniting of different ideas by the interposition of others, which show the relation they bear to each other.[2]

Hume did not deny that there are differences between what we call 'conception', 'judgment', and 'reasoning'; but he did deny that the differences are as indicated here.

Hume was convinced that a judgment need not involve more than one idea. In judgments of existence, such as "God is", existence is not a separate idea joined to the idea of God. "To reflect on anything simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other....Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent"(p.67). Furthermore, "we may exert our reason without employing more than two ideas, and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them"(p.97n). Causal inference, for example, is "a true species of reasoning", yet in causal inference we "infer a cause immediately from its effect..."(p.97n). Hume concluded that "these three acts of the understanding...all resolve themselves into the first, and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects.... The act of mind exceeds not a simple conception"(p.97n).[3]

The relevant distinction does not concern the number of ideas involved in the conception or how they are joined and separated, but the manner of their conception. "The only remarkable difference, which occurs...is when we join belief to the conception, and are perswaded of the truth of what we conceive"(p.97n). The difference between the "simple conception" of God and the judgment that God exists is not one of content. Both involve one and the same idea. The difference is that in the judgment "God exists" the idea of God is conceived in a different manner. This different manner of conception is, according to Hume, belief. A judgment is simply a belief and a belief is a particular manner of forming a conception.

To avoid confusion, there is a final point about judgments that should be kept in mind in what follows. Hume repeatedly refers to judgments as "acts of mind", leaving no doubt that he views judging as a form of mental activity. His practice here is entirely in keeping with his view that belief is a manner of conception. Judgments are therefore not, for Hume, what philosophers nowadays call "propositions". When Hume speaks of judgments, he is referring to specific sorts of mental acts involving conceptions or beliefs; he is not referring to sentences, abstract objects, or anything approximating contemporary views of propositions. This point might seem fairly obvious, but it has been overlooked or ignored by a surprising number of commen-

tators. In the Appendix, I shall, in fact, examine a number of criticisms of Hume that treat his comments about judgments as though they were comments about propositions. My aim in mentioning this sort of error here is to alert the reader to it and thereby avoid any problems that may arise from mistakes of this sort.

Belief

There are difficulties in presenting Hume's theory of belief. Not only does he make a number of different and apparently incompatible claims about the nature of belief in the text of the Treatise but, in the appendix, he presents what appears to be yet another, equally incompatible view. At least part of the difficulty can be attributed to problems with Hume's style. As numerous commentators have pointed out, Hume's method of presentation in the Treatise is often very misleading and likely to bewilder an unprepared reader.[4] Often the problem lies in Hume's presenting a highly simplified account of some basic doctrine without indicating to the reader that it is a simplified account. As the Treatise progresses, he fills in the original account, often a bit at a time, forcing the reader to continually read the later additions back into the initial account.[5]

This is certainly true of Hume's account of belief.

But it would be a mistake to assume that the problems with interpreting Hume's account can be attributed wholly to stylistic infelicities. Hume's initial account was not merely simplified; it was inadequate. In dealing with its inadequacies, Hume was forced to make significant changes. The end result of these changes was an account of belief that was incompatible with his initial account. This final and considered account is presented in the appendix to the Treatise.

The best way to avoid confusion about Hume's theory of belief is to trace its development, noting the problems and ambiguities that led to modifications and, eventually, to the reformulation of the theory in the appendix.

Hume's initial account of belief is introduced in the middle of his discussion of causal inferences. He is attempting to explain how we form beliefs about objects that are not present to the memory or senses. His answer is that we form such beliefs as a result of causal inference. Causal inference, in turn, is the result of our experience of a "constant conjunction" between objects.

> We have no other notion of cause and effect, but that of certain objects, which have always conjoin'd together, and which in all past instances have been found inseparable. We cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction. We only observe the thing itself, and always find that from a constant conjunction the objects acquire an union in the imagination. When the impression of one

> becomes present to us, we immediately form an idea of its usual attendant; and consequently we may establish this as one part of the definition of an opinion or belief, that 'tis and idea related to or associated with a present impression.(p. 93)

While this explains how we arrive at the idea of an absent object, it does not explain our belief. Obviously we can have an idea or conception without believing it. Belief is more than a mere idea. But, Hume asks, "wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?" In cases of knowledge, Hume claims, the answer is clear.

> The answer is easy with regard to propositions, that are prov'd by intuition or demonstration.... The person, who assents not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determin'd to conceive them in that particular manner... Whatever is absurd is unintelligible, nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration.(p. 95)

In fact, the answer cannot be as simple as Hume claims, as his comments in later sections make clear. In part VI, section 1, Hume claims:

> In all the demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error. We must, therefore, in every reasoning, form a new judgment, as a check or con-

> troul on our first judgment or belief....(p. 180)

Clearly people sometimes make judgments such as 7+5=11. But if judgment is simply a manner of conceiving, and it is "impossible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration," it is not at all clear just what a person is doing when he makes such false judgments as 7+5=11. I suspect that Kemp Smith was essentially correct in his observation of Hume's early comments on the distinction between knowledge and belief.

> In distinguishing between knowledge and belief, what chiefly interests Hume is the use to which he proposes to put the distinction, namely, as delimiting the sphere of knowledge. So long as this is achieved--and in the rough it is achieved--the nature and grounds of 'ideal' knowledge need only be indicated; and though this too may be said to have been achieved, the last thing which we need to look for in this section is any really consistent statement of the grounds upon which the fundamental distinction rests.[6]

At any rate, Hume supposes that the situation is different with non-demonstrative judgments. "In reasonings from causation, and concerning matters of fact, this absolute necessity cannot take place, and the imagination is free to conceive both sides of the question"(p. 95). While both sides are conceived or understood, only one side is believed. According to Hume, belief is distinguished from

mere conception by its degree of force and vivacity. His first full account of belief is presented as follows:

> All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, viz., impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity. Our ideas are cop'd from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. When you wou'd any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression.... So that as belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity. An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION.(p. 96)

There are two parts to this initial definition. A believed idea is (1) lively and (2) associated with a present impression. The parts are related because the liveliness of a believed idea is "transferred" or "communicated" from the impression to its associated idea. "When any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity"(p. 98). Consequently, "when the mind is once enliven'd by a present impression, it proceeds to form a more lively idea of the related objects, by a natural transition..."(p. 99).

Having defined belief, Hume is immediately faced with a

problem. An impression may give rise to an associated idea by any of the three associative relations: resemblance, contiguity or cause and effect. But an idea related to a present impression by resemblance or contiguity is usually not a belief. Hume presents the problem as follows:

> For it may be said, that if all the parts of that hypothesis be true, viz., that these three species of relations are deriv'd from the same principles; that their effects in inforcing and invening our ideas are the same; and that belief is nothing but a more forcible and vivid conception of an idea, it shou'd follow, that that action of the mind may not only be deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, but also from those of contiguity and resemblance. But we find by experience, that belief arises only from causation....(p. 107).

Hume's solution to this problem is complex; fortunately, a detailed account is not necessary for present purposes. Essentially, his reply is that, in causal association, the mind feels determined to form a particular type of idea upon experiencing a certain type of impression. But "there is no manner of necessity for the mind to feign any resembling and contiguous objects, and if it feigns such, there is as little necessity for it always to confine itself to the same, without any difference or variation"(p. 109). Because the associative principles of resemblance and contiguity are "fluctuating and uncertain", they can never "operate with any considerable degree of force and constancy"(p.

109).

This solution requires a modification in Hume's original definition. If, in fact, ideas related to a present impression by resemblance and contiguity are not beliefs, then it is more accurate to say that belief is a lively idea causally related to or associated with a present impression. Yet this definition also runs into difficulties. Hume has made the manner of production part of the very definition of belief. This means that nay idea or conception that is not causally associated with a present impression could not be a belief. But, once Hume shifts his attention away from causal inference, he is forced to modify his view once again, for he admits that there are beliefs that do not result from causal association with a present impression.

In the sections following the one where the initial definition appears, Hume introduces various types of belief that do not depend on causal association. For instance, Hume admits that beliefs produced from education (what we would call indoctrination) arise "without any of [the] curious and almost artificial preparation required for the inference of causal reasoning"(p. 116). Beliefs arising from such "education" depend on custom (repetition) but they do not depend on the observed constant conjunction of objects or the impression of similiar objects. There are also beliefs that do not even depend on custom, for instance, the beliefs that arise from madness or "poetical enthusiasm".

> When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood; but every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is receiv'd on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions. A present impression and customary transition are now no longer necessary to inliven our ideas....
>
> We may observe the same effect of poetry in a lesser degree; only with this difference, that the least reflection dissipates the illusions of poetry.... 'Tis, however, certain, that in the warmest of poetical enthusiasms, a poet has a counterfeit belief, and even a kind of vision of his objects....(p. 123)

Hume has clearly abandoned the view that the manner of production is part of the nature of belief. He is left with what was initially the 'first' part of his definition: belief is a lively idea. But this aspect of Hume's theory is also the source of considerable problems. It is not at all clear what Hume means. In various passages Hume seems to suggest four different and incompatible views: (1) belief is equivalent to a lively idea; (2) the liveliness of an idea produces belief; (3) belief produces the liveliness of an idea; and (4) "lively" is simply a way of characterizing or describing a believed idea. In early passages Hume clearly states that the liveliness of an idea is, at least in part,

what constitutes a belief. "An opinion ... or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A lively idea related to or associated with a present impression"(p. 96). "Belief is a more vivid and intense conception of an idea..."(p. 103). "Belief is nothing but a strong and lively idea..."(p. 105). But, in later sections, Hume implies that, at least on most occasions, beliefs are not equivalent to lively ideas but, rather, produced by the liveliness of ideas. In contrasting beliefs produced by causal inference with beliefs arising from education, Hume states that, with beliefs produced by education, Hume states that, with beliefs arising from education, "we must not be contented with saying, that the vividness of the idea produces belief. We must maintain that they are individually the same"(p. 116).

Elsewhere, Hume implies that belief produces the liveliness of the idea:

> The effect, then, of belief is to raise us a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect is can only have by making a idea approach an impression in force and vivacity.... Belief, therefore, since it causes an idea to imitate the effects of the impression, must make it resemble them in these qualities....(p. 119-20).

On the basis of the text alone it is impossible to decide which, if any, of these three views represent Hume's original view. But, by referring to Hume's appendix ac-

count, it is possible to determine his final and considered opinion on how his earlier comments are to be interpreted. I shall now turn to the appendix account.

Recall that Hume originally argued that the only difference between ideas and impressions is their different degrees of force and vivacity. This led him to claim that the only difference there could be between a mere conception and a belief is a difference in the force and vivacity of the ideas involved in the conception. In the appendix, Hume acknowledges a fundamental error in his original argument, an error which, he says, "more mature reflection has discover'd to me in my reasoning"(p. 636). His description is as follows:

> The error ... may be found in Book I, page 96 where I say, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity. I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different <u>feeling</u>, I shou'd have been nearer to the truth.(p. 636)

In abandoning the view that the only difference between an idea and its corresponding impression is the latter's degree of force and vivacity, Hume is repudiating his initial argument leading to his definition of belief as a lively idea related to a present impression. He is, then, free to offer a different account of the nature of belief and this

is exactly what he does in the appendix. According to his appendix account, belief consists in a particular sort of feeling. Hume does not mean that belief is a distinct impression joined to an idea. He describes this erroneous view as follows:

> Belief, beside the simple conception, consists in some impression or feeling, distinguishable from the conception. It does not modify the conception and render it more present and intense: It is only annex'd to it after the same manner that <u>will</u> and <u>desire</u> are annex'd to particular conceptions of good and pleasure....(p. 625)

Hume offers four reasons for rejecting this view. First, "it is directly contrary to experience, and our immediate consciousness"(p. 625). Reasoning is "an operation of our thoughts or ideas" and "nothing ever enters into our <u>conclusions</u> but ideas..."(p. 625). When I hear a friend's voice in the hall, I conclude that he is in the hall. This conclusion contains only ideas. These ideas are "different to the feeling; but there is no distinct or separate impression attending them"(p. 625).

This case can be contrasted with cases where there <u>is</u> a distinct impression or feeling attending an idea. Suppose I am in doubt about some particular matter of fact. Along with the conception, I have a feeling of uneasiness. I am then presented with an argument that resolves the doubt. I

arrive at a belief and feel satisfaction. The uneasiness and satisfaction are particular feelings distinct from and added to the conception.

Hume's other reasons for rejecting the view that belief involves a separate impression are: (1) Belief is fully explicable without supposing any such distinct impression; (2) The causes of belief can be explained without reference to any separate impression; and (3) The effects of belief can be explained without reference to any separate impression. Hume asks, "Why then look any farther, or multiply suppositions without necessity?"(p. 626).

Belief is, then, an idea with a particular kind of phenomenological feel. In claiming that belief is a "manner of conception", Hume does not mean to refer to how the idea is produced but to the way it is experienced. "Belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind"(p. 629). "An idea assented to feels different from a fictitious idea"(p. 629).

While belief is not a distinct impression, it does involve a feeling, and feelings can be described but not defined. Accordingly, Hume does not attempt to offer a definition of belief in the appendix. Instead he attempts to characterize belief in the same manner as he characterized simple impressions: he offers a description of the feeling and gives its causes and effects. The feeling of belief may

be described as "a superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness"(p. 627). Hume acknowledges that such descriptions are bound to be imperfect. "'Tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We may make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is belief..."(p. 629).[7]

The cause of belief is generally custom, although in cases where there is an "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" such as madness, "a present impression and customary transition are ... no longer necessary..."(p. 123). In the conclusions to causal inferences, this custom consists in our experience of constantly conjoined objects; in the case of education, it consists in the repetition of a single conception. The effect of belief is its influence on our thoughts and actions. It "renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination"(p. 629). Likewise, "it gives [ideas] more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind, and renders them the governing principles of all our actions"(p. 629).

Thus, in Hume's final view, belief is not equivalent to the force and vivacity (or liveliness) of an idea nor is it the cause or effect of a lively idea. Therefore, Hume can consistently maintain that an idea can be forceful and vivid

without being believed. There is, then, no problem with his view that "poetical enthusiasm" can make an idea lively without producing belief. "How great soever the pitch may be, to which the vivacity rises, 'tis evident, that in poetry it never has the same feeling with that which arises in the mind, when we reason, tho' even upon the lowest species of probability"(p. 630). Because belief does not consist in the force and vivacity of an idea, Hume can also consistently maintain that a believed idea can be less forceful and vivid than an idea that is not believed.

These points are particularly important in understanding the role of general rules in Hume's epistemology. According to Hume, "a reflexion on general rules keeps us from augmenting our beliefs upon every increase of the force and vivacity of our ideas"(p. 632). In a later chapter, I will return to this important point to show the importance of general rules in regulating our beliefs.

Imagination

Hume's view of the nature of the imagination is basically Cartesian or, more specifically, Malebranchian.[8] While Malebranche's treatment of the imagination is both psychological and physiological, Hume concentrates on the psychological aspects and, for the most part, "neglects the advantages" of presenting a physiological account.[9] Although Hume follows Malebranche in his account of the nature

of the imagination, he develops a completely original view of the role of the imagination in human thought and action. To understand Hume's departure from Malebranche, it is first important to understand their agreement with respect to the nature of the imagination.

According to both Descartes and Malebranche, it is the mind or soul that thinks and perceives. The ideas involved in thinking and perceiving come from two sources: from the mind itself and from the senses. The first sort are the ideas of the pure understanding or pure intellect. As I mentioned earlier, Descartes believed these ideas are innate, while Malebranche, following Augustine, believed that such ideas are ideal archetypes in the mind of God. They are contained in God, not in the human mind, but the pure intellect directly apprehends them in God. The second sort of ideas are obtained when the mind directs its attention to the body and perceives via the imagination. According to Malebranche, the imagination is intimately related to the senses. "There is such a close relationship between the senses and imagination that they should not be separated.... The differences between these two faculties is but on e of degree."[10] The imagination is the faculty by which the mind reproduces what has been previously experienced by the senses. Memories are thereby included under ideas of the imagination.

Like Descartes, Malebranche supposed that the processes of the imagination depended on the activity of animal spirits in the brain. "The imagination consists only in the soul's power of forming images of objects producing changes in the fibers of the brain..."(II 1.1,88). Malebranche implies, but does not specifically state, that memories are distinguished from other ideas of the imagination by the fact that they reproduce ideas in the order of the original sensations. "Our brain fibers, having once received certain impressions through the flow of animal spirits and by the actions of objects, retain some facility for receiving these same dispositions for some time.... Memory consists only in this facility"(II 1.5,106).

Sensation consists in the understanding's perception of something "upon occasion of the appropriate natural events taking place in the organs of the body...(I 1,3). When the sense organs are stimulated by an object, the "agitation" of the fibers in the sense organs are "communicated" to the brain via animal spirits--"the most refined and agitated parts of the blood"(II 1.2,91). The passage of animal spirits leaves "traces" in the brain. Both the force with which objects strike the senses, and the frequency with which the same kind of object is presented to the senses determine the depth of the traces and, thus, the strength of the consciousness of sensation. Imagining and remembering are "a kind of weak and languid sensation the mind receives

only because of certain traces being produced or aroused in the brain by the flow of spirits"(Conclusion, 261). When, either according to the will or in some other manner, animal spirits flow into the brain traces made by previous impressions of the senses, those impressions are "revived" and we imagine or remember.

The similarity between Malebranche and Hume is nicely summarized by Charles McCracken:

> Both sensation and imagination occur, Descartes and Malebranche supposed, because a rush of animal spirits to the brain imprints traces there that occasion an 'image' in consciousness; if these spirits flow forcefully, as happens when our sense organs are stimulated, a deep trace is made on the brain, and the images produced are _fortes et vives_; such images we call sensation. If, however, the spirits flow weakly, as is usual when the cause of the flow is internal to the body, they produce a superficial trace on the brain, which occasions in consciousness that _espece de sensation faibles et languissates_ that we term imagination. While Hume does not engage in this sort of speculative physiology, he and Malebranche are in complete accord here about the difference between sensation and imagination. Indeed, Hume's terminology follows Malebranche: where one speaks of sensations as '_fortes et vives_', the other speaks of their 'force and liveliness'; and where one describes ideas of the imagination as '_faibles et languissantes_', the other says they are 'faint and languid'.[11]

Later I will show that Hume does at least once quite

explicitly "engage in this sort of speculative physiology" and that there is good reason to suppose that he accepted Malebranche's physiological model. For now it is sufficient to note an important point neglected by McCracken. This point concerns the different focus in the methods of distinguishing sensing from imagining in the discussions of Descartes, Malebranche and Hume. Descartes's manner of distinguishing sensing from imagining is objective: it is focused on their physical causes or manner of production:

> When external objects act on my senses, they print on them an idea, or rather a figure, of themselves; and when the mind attends to these images imprinted on the [pineal] gland in this way, it is said to perceive. When on the other hand the images on the gland are not imprinted by external objects but by the mind itself, which fashions and shapes them in the brain in the absence of external objects, then we have imagination. The difference between perception and imagination is thus really just this, that in perception the images are imprinted by external objects which are actually present, whilst in imagination the images are imprinted by the mind without any external objects, and with the windows shut, as it were.[12]

Malebranche presents the difference between sensing and imagining in terms of both the objective difference and the subjective difference--their feeling to inner consciousness. The difference to consciousness is the different degrees of force and liveliness. The objective difference lies in their manner of production. Sensation arises from the

action of external objects on the senses; imaginings arise when the will or some other internal event causes animal spirits to flow into the traces left by previous sensations.

Hume is interested in the examination of the understanding and his primary concern is with the contents of consciousness. His presentation of the difference between sensing and imagining is directed toward the subjective difference or difference to consciousness. The objective difference is a subject that he claims "belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers..."(p. 8).

Another aspect of Malebranche's view adopted by Hume deals with the connection between ideas of the imagination. According to Malebranche, the connections between ideas of the imagination depend on the connections between brain traces. There are three primary types of connections between traces: (1) natural connections, (2) connections based on identity in time, and (3) connections based on resemblance. Natural connections are described by Malebranche as follows:

> There are traces in our brains that are naturally tied to one another, and even certain emotions of the spirits, because that is necessary to preservation of life.... For example, the trace of a great elevation one sees below oneself, and from which one is in danger of falling ... is naturally tied to the one that represents death to us, and to an emotion of the spirit that disposes us

to flight....(I 1.5,106)

Hume, in a passage reminiscent of Malebranche, describes this connection as "deriv'd solely from custom and experience"(p. 148).[13] But, as I will show in my discussion of custom, Hume's view of what constitutes a natural connection is both more extensive and more complex than that of Malebranche.

The second type of connection depends on the identity of time when traces are made. "It is enough that many traces were produced at the same time for them all to rise together again"(II 1.5,106). From his examples it is clear that by "identity in time" Malebranche meant to include traces produced in succession. The original traces produced by experiencing two objects at the same time or one immediately following another will be only weakly connected, and such connections will be easily broken. But when objects are continually conjoined in experience, the animal spirits will cut a deep path between the traces occasioned by the two objects, forming a strong connection. Upon experiencing one of these objects, the animal spirits that flow into its traces will continue on into the connected trace producing the idea of the object that has been frequently conjoined with it. The result is that men frequently judge that there is some real connection between objects that are often joined in their experience.

> Men never fail to judge that a thing is the cause of a given effect when the two are conjoined, given that the true cause of the effect is unknown to them. This is why everyone conclude that a moving ball which strikes another is the true and principal cause of the motion it communicates to the other, and that the soul's will is the true and principal cause of movement in the arms, and other such prejudices--because it always happens that a ball moves when struck by another, that our arms move almost every time we want them to and that we do not sensibly perceive what else could be the cause of these movements.(III 2.3,224)

The third sort of connection between ideas depends on resemblance. Resembling objects produce resembling traces, and these, in turn, produce resembling ideas. This can lead both to errors in sensation and errors in judgment.[14] It can lead to error in sensation because we mistakenly take one object to be another resembling object. Suppose, for instance, that we have experienced two resembling objects and thus have two similar brain traces. When we are later presented with one of these objects, animal spirits may flow into the traces occasioned by the other resembling object. The result is that, in a sense, we actually experience the non-present object resembling the present object.[15] This generally occurs when one of the objects is more common or familiar than the other. Familiar objects have made deeper traces from the frequent flow of animal spirits. When a less familiar object is presented and this object bears some

resemblance to the familiar object, the animal spirits flow into the deeper traces left by the familiar object. "When the spirits have passed through traces many times, they enter there more easily than other places nearby, through which they have never passed, or have not passed as often..."(II 212, 134).

Errors of judgment arise from mistaking one idea for another resembling idea. This mistake has the same source as that found in sensation. "The animal spirits that were directed by the action of external objects, or even by orders of the soul [i.e. by the will], to produce certain traces in the brain often produce others that truly resemble them in some things, but that are not quite the traces of these same objects, nor those the soul desired to be represented..."(II 212,134-35).

Hume's principles of association among ideas are similar to Malebranche's connections of ideas, yet they differ in some important respects. The principles of association are resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. According to Hume, these are "natural" connections in the sense that they are the universal principles "by which one idea naturally introduces another"(p. 10). We can, of course, combine and relate ideas in any way we choose. Such combining and relating would then be attributable to the will. But the association of ideas by resemblance, contiguity and

cause and effect is an activity of the imagination and does not depend on the will. With respect to resemblance, Hume is in complete agreement with Malebranche. But in place of Malebranche's identity in time, Hume substitutes the principles of contiguity in space and time and cause and effect. Both these principles have features in common with Malebranche's principle of identity. According to Hume, the imagination associates ideas of objects that we have experienced to be contiguous in time or space. According to Malebranche, identity accounts for the following situation:

> If ... a man finds himself in some public ceremony, if he notes all the circumstances and all the principal persons assisting at it, the time, place, day, and all the other particulars, it will suffice for him to remember the place, or even some less noteworthy circumstance of the ceremony, to have all the others recur to him.(II 1/5,105)

For Hume, this would be explained by the associative relation of contiguity in space and time.

On Malebranche's account it is the (near) identity in time that objects are experienced--their constant conjunction--that leads us to connect their ideas so closely that we suppose a causal connection. Unlike Malebranche, Hume believes that there are causal connections between objects, yet he agrees with Malebranche that the strong connection between ideas in the imagination produced by constant conjunctions leads us to mistakenly suppose that we

know of some necessary connection between objects.

So far I have dealt primarily with similarities between Hume's and Malebranche's accounts of the imagination. There are two differences that bear examination. The first difference is superficial, but can be misleading. The second difference is both fundamental and crucial. It is fundamental in that it distinguishes Malebranche the Cartesian rationalist from Hume the empiricist. It is crucial in understanding why general rules are so important for Hume's epistemology. I will begin by examining the superficial, but possibly misleading, difference.

When comparing Hume's and Malebranche's accounts of the imagination, one cannot help but notice one pervasive difference. Hume's account lacks the constant appeal to physiology found in Malebranche. McCracken explains this by claiming that "Hume had little taste for such purported physiological explanations of association and sometimes derided that 'imaginary dissection of the brain...'".[16] McCracken's claim is based on a careless reading of the passage in question. Hume is pointing out that, in his initial presentation of the principles of association, he did not take advantage of the physiological explanation. But his recognition that some such account underlies the facts of association is made clear by the passage following the one quoted by McCracken. Hume continues: "But tho' I have ne-

glected any advantage, which I might have drawn from this topic in explaining the relations of ideas, I am afraid I must here have recourse to it, in order to account for the mistakes that arise from these relations"(p. 60). He then proceeds to present a physiological explanation of the errors arising from resemblance which is clearly similar to Malebranche's account.

> As the mind is endow'd with a power of exciting any idea it pleases; whenever it dispatches the spirits into that region of the brain, in which the idea is plac'd; these spirits always excite the idea, when they run into the proper traces, and rummage that cell, which belongs to the idea. But as their motion is seldom direct, and naturally turns a little to the one side or the other; for this reason the animal spirits, falling into the contiguous traces, present other related ideas in lieu of that which the mind desir'd at first to survey.(p. 60-61)

Whether or not Hume had a distaste for physiological explanations, I cannot pretend to determine. But there are two more obvious reasons for his general reluctance to make such appeals. First, his main concern is with the phenomena of consciousness themselves, not with the underlying physiological causes. Hume is interested in examining certain facts of our experience to determine the "extent and force" of the understanding. The physiology underlying such facts is something that, like the examination of our sensations, "belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers..."(p.

8). Second, Hume recognized the danger of placing too much emphasis on physiology. The discovery of a mistake in the physiological account could lead readers to suppose that the facts of consciousness being explained are also unwarranted. But it is evident that he is concerned about the possibility of such a mistake on the part of his readers in the disclaimer that preceeds the physiological explanation cited above.

> I shall only premise, that we must distinguish exactly betwixt the phenomenon itself, and the causes, which I shall assign for it; and must not imagine from any uncertainty in the latter, that the former is also uncertain. The phenomena may be real, tho' my explication be chimerical. The falsehood of one is no consequence of that of the other; tho' at the same time we may observe, that 'tis very natural for us to draw such a consequence....(p. 60).

The second difference between Hume and Malebranche is best approached through the subject of error. According to Malebranche, "error is the cause of men's misery; it is the sinister principle that has produced the evil in the world ... and we may hope for sound and genuine happiness only by seriously laboring to avoid it"(I 1,1). Accordingly, one of the main tasks Malebranche sets himself is to "examine the causes and nature of our errors..."(I 1,1). The most "orderly and illuminating" method of examining error is one that considers them in "their birth and origin"(I 1.1). Be-

cause the senses and imagination depend on physiological processes of the body, the examination of the birth and origin of their errors requires an examination of this physiology. The errors of the imagination are first traced to certain general principles: the connecting of ideas of the imagination according to resemblance and identity in time. These principles of connections among ideas are then explained according to their physiological origins.

Like Malebranche, Hume recognizes that the principles of association inherent in the imagination are apt to lead to errors. Resemblance is the major culprit, but contiguity and cause and effect are also sources of error. "Tho' resemblance be the relation which most readily produces a mistake in ideas, yet the others of causation and contiguity may also concur in the same influence"(p. 61). But, while Hume agrees that these principles and the mistakes that arise from them are caused by certain physiological processes, he does not believe that knowledge of these processes is as important as knowing that such mistakes do occur.

In addition to the particular processes involved in errors, Malebranche continually stresses a more general reason for error. We are constantly misled by sensation and the ideas of the imagination which arise from sensation because we take them to be a source of knowledge about the real natures of objects. Malebranche, in the Cartesian tradi-

tion, emphatically denies that sense and imagination can ever be the source of such knowledge. The sense and imagination depend entirely on the body and are provided by God only for the preservation of the body. They are not meant to provide us with knowledge of objects, but only with limited truths about the relation of objects to our bodies. Malebranche's rule for avoiding error in the senses applies equally well to the imagination.

> Never judge by means of the senses as to what things are in themselves, but only as to the relation they have to the body because, in fact, the senses were given to us, not to know the truth of things in themselves, but only for the preservation of our body.(I 5, 24)

In he conclusion of the book on sense and imagination Malebranche notes:

> All the thoughts the soul has through the body, or through dependence upon the body, are all for the sake of the body ... they are all false or obscure ... they serve only to unite us to sensible goods and to everything that can procure them for us; ... this union involves us in infinite errors and very great miseries ....(II 3.6 195)

The source of our knowledge of the real natures of objects is the pure understanding, and it is by the ideas of the pure understanding that we correct the errors of the senses and imagination.

Our natural judgments--judgments of the senses and

imagination--are adequate for their purpose. They serve to preserve the body. But even in this capacity they are liable to error and require regulation by the pure understanding. In judgments about the nature of objects the senses and imagination can give us no truth whatsoever; such judgments are "all false and obscure".

According to Hume there is no faculty of pure understanding. The following important passage is clearly directed against any view that assumes the existence of such a faculty:

> I shall here take occasion to propose a second observation concerning our demonstrative reasonings, which is suggested by the same subject of mathematics. 'Tis usual with mathematicians, to pretend, that those ideas, which are their object, are of so refin'd and spiritual a nature, that they fall not under the conception of the fancey, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view, of which the superior faculties of the soul are alone capable. The same notion runs thro' most parts of philosophy, and is principally made use of to explain our abstract ideas, and to show how we can form an idea of a triangle, for instance, which shall neither be an isosceles nor scalenum, nor be confin'd to any particular length and proportion of sides. 'Tis easy to see, why philosophers are so fond of this notion of some spiritual and refin'd perceptions; since by that means they cover many of their absurdities, and may refuse to submit to the decisions of clear ideas, by appealing to such as are obscure and uncertain. But to destroy this artifice, we need but reflect on that principle so oft

> insisted on, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions.(p. 72)

In eliminating the faculty of pure understanding, Hume is faced with the task of accounting for certain features of thought traditionally attributed to that faculty. As for the ideas attributed to the pure understanding, Hume either denies we have them or argues that they are really products of the imagination that are founded on experience. But my primary concern is with another feature that Hume needs to account for--the regulation of our judgments. He could not follow Malebranche in an appeal to the pure understanding to determine what kinds of judgments provide us with truth or to account for the means by which we correct our natural judgments. What Hume needs is an empirical method of regulating and correcting natural judgments. Such a method must itself be explicable within the framework of natural judgments. General rules provide just such a method.

Custom

Descartes, Malebranche and Locke all acknowledge the influence of custom on human thought and action. All agree that customs are primarily the result of past repetition. But, while they agree that customs are primarily the result of repetition, they acknowledge exceptions. Descartes, for instance, remarks:

> [A] custom can be acquired by a solitary

> action, and does not require long usage. Thus when we unexpectedly meet with something very foul in food that we are eating with relish, the surprise that this event gives us may so change the disposition of our brain, that we can no longer see any such food without horror....[17]

Malebranche and Locke cite similar examples.[18] As they see it, the distinguishing feature of customs is not that they result from past repetition but that they are arbitrary as opposed to natural, a distinction I shall discuss in detail below. Hume, on the other hand, takes past repetition as the distinguishing characteristic of custom. "We call everything custom which proceeds from past repetition without any new reasoning or conclusion"(p. 102).

Following Descartes' mechanical account, Malebranche supposed that customs or habits are formed when "pathways" in the body become sufficiently open or worn to allow easy passage of animal spirits. "Little by little the animal spirits open and smooth these paths by their continual flow, so that in time they find no more resistance"(II 1.5,108). Locke apparently accepted the same explanation:

> Custom settles habits of thinking in the understanding, as well as of determining in the will, and motions in the body: all which seems to be but trains of motioins i the animal spirits, which, once set a going, continue in the same steps they have been used to; which, by often treading, are worn into a smooth path and the motion in it becomes easy, and as it were natural.(II 33.6,529)[19]

There is no reason to suppose that Hume differed from his predecessors with respect to the mechanics involved in custom. This account follows naturally from the Malebranchian account of the imagination, an account that Hume clearly accepted. Furthermore, in discussing the effects of custom in Book II, Hume makes frequent reference to physiological processes. He refers to the "difficulty of spirits moving in their new direction", and he explains that "this difficulty excites the spirits" and that surprise "puts the spirits into agitation"(p. 423).

All agree that the influence of custom can be found in thought, passions, and movement. Locke and Malebranche take the skill of a musician as the paradigm of customary movement.[20] Custom is also a source of connection between ideas and passions. In an example later repeated by Malebranche, Descartes claims:

> When a dog sees a partridge he is naturally disposed to run toward it, and when he hears a gun fired, this sound naturally incites him to flight. But nevertheless setters are usually so trained that the sight of a partridge causes them to stop, and the wound which they afterwards hear when a shot is fired over them, causes them to run toward it.[21]

Descartes notes that such conditioning is also possible in men "and that even those who have the feeblest souls can

acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them".[22] Left to accidental circumstances, the connections established by such conditioning are apt to produce various pathological aversions, fears, and phobias. But this capacity for linking ideas and passions, when properly directed, can be used to man's benefit.

Finally, custom can be the source of connections between ideas. I have already discussed Hume's and Malebranche's views on the connection between ideas of the imagination. Here I will concentrate on the important difference between Hume and his predecessors over the distinction between "natural" and "customary" connections of ideas.[23]

Locke draws the distinctions as follows:

> Some of our ideas have a natural correspondence and connection one with another: it is the office and excellency of our reason to trace these, and hold them together in their peculiar beings. Besides this there is another connection of ideas wholly owing to chance and custom. Ideas that in themselves are not all of kin, come to be so united in some men's minds, that it is very hard to separate them, they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the understanding, but its associate appears with it; and if they are more than two which are thus united, the whole gang, always inseparable, show themselves together.(II 33.6,529)[24]

According to Locke, judgment consists in the joining and separating of ideas. A natural consequence of this view is

that when ideas are joined in an arbitrary manner, the resulting judgment is likewise arbitrary. Habits or customs of thought consist of just such arbitrary judgments.

While Locke distinguishes between natural and customary connections between ideas, Malebranche and Descartes make a further distinction. There are connections between the nonsensuous ideas of the pure understanding. These ideas and the relations between them provide us with our real knowledge, including our genuine knowledge of the physical world. There are also natural connections between the ideas of the imagination. These connections are essential for the preservation of our bodies. They are natural in the sense that they depend on inborn mechanical dispositions of our bodies. According to Malebranche:

> There are traces in our brains that are naturally tied to one another, and even to certain emotions of the spirits, because that is necessary to preservation of life; and their connection cannot be broken, or at least not easily broken, because it is good that it be always the same.... It consists in a disposition of the brain fibers that we have from birth.(II 1.5,106)

Finally, there are customary connections. These connections are also between ideas of the imagination and depend on body mechanisms. But they are either accidental, such as the connections established by the identity of times when objects are experienced, or they are artificial, such

as the connections established by education.

Unlike Locke, Malebranche does not believe that judgment consists in the joining and separating of ideas. Malebranche's view of judgment is one that is later adopted, in part, by Hume.

> There is no difference on the part of the understanding between a simple perception, a judgment, and an inference, other than that the understanding by a simple perception perceives a simple thing without any relation to anything else whatsoever, that in judgments it perceives the relations between two or more things, and that in inferences it perceives the relations among the relations of things. Consequently, all the operations of the understanding are nothing but pure perceptions. (I 1.2,7)[25]

This is judgment on the part of the understanding; it "is only the perception of the relation found between two or more things"(I 1.2,7). yet the will also plays a crucial role in judgment. According to Malebranche, it is the will that assents or withholds assent from the perception of the understanding. In this he and Hume part company. As I noted in the section on judgment, Hume held that the assent involved in judgment is belief and does not depend on the will.

What is significant about Malebranche's theory of judgment is that the particular manner of joining ideas does not determine whether or not a judgment is arbitrary. What de-

termines the latter is the truth of the perception--its representation of a relation that actually holds between ideas or things. Natural judgments do provide us with a measure of truth--the relation of objects to our bodies. They do not provide us with truth about the objects themselves. Customary judgments, on the other hand, do not provide us with truth about the relation of objects to our bodies or about objects themselves. Such judgments are, therefore, arbitrary.

Hume agrees with Malebranche that natural connections are based on inborn dispositions necessary for preservation, but he does not separate natural connections from customary ones. The connecting of ideas by custom is both natural and necessary for preservation. According to Hume, the imagination has natural dispositions or "propensities" to join ideas in certain ways. One such natural propensity is to join ideas by custom or repetition. But the fact that the joining of ideas by custom is both natural and necessary to human nature does not preclude the possibility that some particular connection arising from custom will not be necessary or may actually be destructive. The same principle accounts for both of the following judgments:

> One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally; tho'that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and

> inlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his usual conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too; But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man.(p. 225-26)

Here Hume is clearly differentiating between a just judgment and one that is not just. Yet both depend on the same principle of custom. Thus, the "justness" of a judgment is not determined by the principle that gives rise to it. To say that a judgment is derived from custom is not to say that it is arbitrary. Like Malebranche, Hume distinguishes between arbitrary judgments by their ability to provide truth. Yet Hume believes that natural judgments, judgments based on custom, can provide truth. But they can just as naturally lead to error. If wrong judgment is to be avoided, natural judgments must be regulated. This regulation is achieved by employing general rules. The next chapter is devoted to the examination of the formation of these rules and a description of how they serve to regulate and correct natural judgments.

NOTES

[1] Port Royal Logic was the more common name for The Art of Thinking by Antoine Arnauld. The view Hume rejects is there stated as follows:

> "To conceive a thing is simply to view that thing as it presents itself to the mind.... To judge is to join two ideas, affirming or denying the one idea of the other.... To reason is to form one judgment from several others." Antoine Arnauld, The Art of Thinking, trans. James Dickoff and Partricia James (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 29.

[2] David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, second edition, revised with notes by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 96. All citations to the Treatise are to this edition. Hereafter references to the Treatise will be indicated by page numbers given in the text.

[3] Hume agrees with Malebranche here. The similarity in wording suggests that Hume was directly influenced by Malebranche's view.

> "There is no difference on the part of the understanding between a simple perception, a judgment, and an inference, other than that the understanding by a simple perception perceives a simple thing without any relation to anything else whatsoever, that in judgment it perceives the relations between two or more things, and that in inference it perceives the relations among the relations of things. Consequently, all the operations of the understanding are nothing but pure perceptions." Nicolas Malebranche, The Search After Truth, trans. Thomas Lennon and Paul Olscamp (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1980), p. 7.

[4] Cf. Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines (London: Macmillan, 1941; reprint ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), esp. pp. 110-16 and 218-19.

[5] For an extensive treatment of this topic see Donald Livingston's Hume's Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), Chapter 2.

[6] Kemp Smith, p. 349.

[7] Hume makes the same point in the first Enquiry:

> "Were we to attempt a definition of this sentiment, we should, perhaps, find it very difficult, if not an impossible task; in the same manner as if we should endeavor to define the feeling of cold or passion of anger, to a creature who never had ant experience of these sentiments. BELIEF is the true and proper name of this feeling; and no one is ever at a loss to know the meaning of that term; because every man is at every moment conscious of the sentiment represented by it. It may not, however, be improper to attempt a description of this sentiment...." An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised with notes by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 48-49.

[8] I am in full agreement with John Wright in this regard. For a more extensive treatment of Hume's adoption of Malebranche's psychophysiological views see Wright's The Sceptical Realism of David Hume (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1983).

[9] Cf. Treatise, p. 60.

[10] Nicolas Malebranche, The Search After Truth, trans. Thomas Lennon and Paul Olscamp (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1980), p. 187. All citations to the Search are to this edition. Hereafter references will be indicated in the text by book, chapter, section (where applicable) and page. Eg., (II 1.5, 100).

[11] Charles J. McCracken, Malebranche and British Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 280.

[12] Rene Descartes, Conversations with Burman, trans. John Cottingham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 27.

[13] The passage from Hume is as follows:

> "Let us consider the case of a man, who being hung out from a high tower in a cage of iron cannot forbear trembling, when he surveys the precipie below him, tho' he knows himself to be perfectly secure from falling, by his experience of the solidity of the iron, which supports him; and tho' the idea of fall and descent, and harm and death, be deriv'd solely from custom and experience" (p. 148).

[14] It may seem odd to attribute error to the senses rather than to judgments based on the senses. But Male-

branche believes that there are two types of judgment. One involves the understanding's perception of a relation between ideas or objects combined with the assent or dissent of the will. The other is "natural judgment" which he describes as "compound sensation". It is in the latter sense that sensations can be considered erroneous.

[15] Malebranche's example is interesting:

> "The reason we normally see a face in the moon ... is that our brain traces of a face are very deep, because we often look at faces, and with much attention. So that the animal spirits meeting resistance in the other places of the brain, are easily detoured from the direction that the light of the moon impresses on them when we look at it, in order to enter into those traces to which the ideas of a face are attached by nature"(II 2.2, 135).

[16] McCracken, p. 279.

[17] Rene Descartes, The Passions of the Soul, in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1911), 1:356.

[18] Cf. Malebranche (I 13,65); John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, collated by Alexander Fraser, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1959), Chap. 33, 1:531.

[19] Like Hume, Locke is cautious about committing himself to a particular physiological explanation: "Whether the natural causes ... be the motions of animal spirits, I will not determine, how probable soever ... it appears to be so ..."(Chap. 33, 1:530).

[20] Cf. Malebranche (II 1.5, 108); Locke, (Chap. 33, 1:530).

[21] Descartes, Passions, p. 356.

[22] Ibid.

[23] For a more extensive treatment of this topic see John Wright's The Sceptical Realism of David Hume, esp. pp. 151-59 and pp. 221-30.

[24] Compare to Malebranche: "... brain traces are so well tied to one another that none can be aroused without all those which were imprinted at the same time being aroused"(II 1.5,105). Also, "It is enough that many traces

were produced at the same time for them all to rise again together"(II 1.5,106).

[25] Compare to Hume:

> "What we may in general affirm concerning the three acts of the understanding [viz., conception, judgment and reasoning] is, that taking them in a proper light, they all resolve themselves into the first, and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving objects. Whether we consider a single object, or several; whether we dwell on these objects, or run from them to others; and in whatever form or order we survey them, the act of mind exceeds not a simple conception..."(p. 97n).

C H A P T E R I I

THE FORMATION AND STRUCTURE OF GENERAL RULES

Hume's first discussion of the operation of general rules is found in Book 1, part 3, section 8 of the Treatise. The subject of the section is probabilities determined in philosophically unjustified ways. Hume cites four cases, calling them "unphilosophical probabilities".

It is important to remember what Hume means by "probability". His discussion of probability follows his discussion of belief and is meant as a continuation of the same subject. Having discussed the nature of belief and how we come to form beliefs, Hume turns to the topic of how we come to form various degrees of belief. Hume uses the term 'probable' to describe those judgments which are made with less than complete certainty. His interest is in how and why we form different degrees of belief or assurance in our various judgments.

Hume is careful to inform the reader of his meaning. At the beginning of his discussion of probability in section 11, Hume notes that some philosophers (including himself at other points) have divided all our reasoning into knowledge and probability, the former based on the relation of ideas, the latter including any other forms of reasoning. This, of course, entails classifying all causal judgments as proba-

ble. But Hume states his intention of preserving the "common signification of words" by allowing that "many arguments from causality exceed probability..."(p. 124). Thus, at least for the present discussion, he will divide reasonings into three kinds, depending on the degree of assurance attached to them:

> By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence, which is still attended with uncertainty.(p. 124).

According to Hume, there are two philosophically sanctioned methods of proportioning belief: probability of chances and probability of causes. In the case of chances, such as a roll of a die, belief is proportioned according to the "superior number of chances"(p. 127). If the die has four sides marked with the same number and two sides marked with a different number, we conclude that it is more probable that the number marked on four sides will turn up on any given roll. In the case of causes, belief is proportioned according to the frequency with which an effect has been observed to follow from a given cause. In both cases Hume shows how the degrees of belief are explicable according to his theory of belief. His explanation is not important for present purposes. What is important is Hume's claim that

these two methods constitute the "philosophical" forms of probability. Philosophers accept these as legitimate ways to proportion belief; they are "reasonable foundation of belief and opinion"(p. 143).

In the previous section on causality and belief, Hume's primary concern has not been to present a normative philosophical system. While he has made distinctions between good and bad judgments, he has not advanced a thesis about how we ought to make causal judgments or about how we ought to proportion our beliefs. His primary concern so far has been how we, in fact, make causal judgments and form beliefs. As I showed in Chapter I, Hume adopts and develops the psychophysiological view of natural judgments held by Malebranche. If his account is not meant to be a philosophical analysis of how we make rationally justified judgments, but, rather, a psychophysiological account of how human beings in fact make judgments, then his account must be capable of explaining all of our judgments, not simply those judgments we consider philosophically respectable. His discussion of unphilosophical probabilities is an attempt to show that certain forms of judgment that we take to be illegitimate or unjustified are based on the same principles as legitimate probabilities, that is, the same natural psychophysiological mechanisms.

Hume does not conclude that we have no grounds for making a distinction between justified and unjustified judg-

ments. The distinction is well founded. But if his account of the origin and nature of our judgments and beliefs is correct, then the method for distinguishing between justified and unjustified judgments must be different from what philosophers have commonly supposed. Of course, Hume is not introducing a new point here. There are two general themes in Book I of the Treatise. The first is Hume's account of the nature of the understanding. The second is Hume's insistence that, given a correct account of the nature of the understanding, the traditional, rationalistically conceived philosophical systems leave the majority of our judgments either inexplicable or completely unjustified. His best known example is causal judgment.

As I explained in my first chapter, Hume denied that there is any faculty of pure understanding as understood by Descartes and Malebranche. What is of particular interest and importance in his account of unphilosophical probabilities is the appearance of a non-rationalistic method for correcting and justifying certain forms of judgment. This method involves the use of general rules. While Hume is only interested in a particular kind of error in judgment in this section and is not specifically addressing the question of justification in general, I believe that his account of general rules provides the rudiments of an empirically based system of judgment justification. This rudimentary account

is later expanded to cover moral and political judgments. There are important limits to the justification provided by general rules, and these limits will be addressed in Chapter III. In this chapter my main concern is to work out the account of general rules presented by Hume in the discussion of unphilosophical probabilities.

According to Hume, there are four types of unphilosophical probability. Each is based on a certain "principle" of judgment that, while unjustified, is fully explicable on Hume's account of belief. The four principles are as follows:

> 1. An argument founded on any remembered matter of fact "is more convincing, according as the fact is recent or remote"(p. 143).
>
> 2. A recent experiment affects us more than one long past.
>
> 3. The longer the required inference, the less it affects our judgment.
>
> 4. Rashly formed general rules produce prejudice which influences our judgment.

Belief, recall, can be generally characterized as a "lively idea related to or associated with a present impression"(p. 96). Probabilities are weaker or lesser degrees of belief. Given the mechanics involved in the production of the majority of our beliefs, it follows that the fainter the original impression the less vivacity there is to transfer to an associated idea. The result is weaker belief. Un-

philosophical probabilities of the first sort are explained by the fact that more remote memories are generally less lively than more recent ones and thus have a lesser degree of vivacity to transfer to the associated idea. The feeling of belief tends to weaken over time. As it weakens it "weighs" less in our thoughts and has less influence on our behavior. This might explain some people's seeming inability to learn from their mistakes. In order to learn from mistakes, one must be able to assign equal weight both to certain remembered facts and to present facts. And this is what a judicious reasoner will do. But not everyone is a judicious reasoner and, as some regretted action becomes more remote, the memory of it loses the vivacity needed to enliven an idea to the degree needed to influence our present behavior.

The second principle is similar to the first. While the first principle depends upon the change in authority of a remembered fact, the second principle depends on the change in authority of a remembered argument. Hume's own example aptly illustrates the point:

> A drunkard, who has seen his companion die of a debauch, is struck with this instance for some time, and dreads a like accident for himself: But as the memory of it decays away by degrees, his former security returns, and the danger seems less certain and real.(p. 144).

Again this fact is explained by the mechanics of belief. "A lively impression produces more assurance than a faint one; because it has more original force to communicate to the related idea, which thereby acquires a greater force and vivacity"(p. 144).

The third principle--the longer the chain of inference, the less we are affected--explains how "proofs" (judgments free from uncertainty) degenerate into "probabilities" (judgments "attended with uncertainty"). If our degree of assurance is generated by the degree of vivacity transferred from the original impression to the associated idea, then, Hume believes, "'tis evident this vivacity must decay in proportion to the distance, and must lose somewhat in each transition"(p. 144). It might be noted that this is only "evident" assuming a physiology of animal spirits.

The final form of unphilosophical probability is rashly formed general rules. The way these general rules are formed is particularly important. While following rashly formed rules leads to prejudice and thus to errors in judgment, following judiciously formed general rules is, according to Hume, the only way to correct prejudice and all other unphilosophical probabilities. To understand the distinction between rashly formed and judiciously formed general rules and the important corrective capacity of the latter, it will be necessary to examine Hume's account in some detail.

Hume supplies the following account of prejudice arising from rashly formed general rules:

> An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity; for which reason, tho' the conversation of the former in any instance be visibly very agreeable, and of the latter very judicious, we have entertain'd such a prejudice against them, that they must be dunces or fops in spite of sense and reason.(p. 146-47)[1]

What must be accounted for within Hume's general account of belief formation is "why men form general rules, and allow them to influence their judgment, even contrary to present observation and experience..."(p. 147). Hume's answer is that "it proceeds from those very same principles, on which all judgments concerning cause and effect depend. Our judgments concerning cause and effect are deriv'd from habit and experience..."(p. 147) General rules arise from natural processes of the imagination. Like the other three unphilosophical probabilities, rashly formed general rules are derived from the same principles (based on the same processes) as all our causal judgments (including "proofs"), viz., custom and experience.

An obvious question arises here. The rash formation of general rules is an illegitimate method of belief formation. Yet Hume claims it is based on the very same principles as the legitimate philosophical probabilities. What, then,

distinguishes the two, allowing us to view one as justified, the other as unjustified? The answer lies in the formation of the rules.

Hume's account of the fundamental method for forming causal judgments involves the customary transition of the imagination based on a past constant conjunction. Thus, it is puzzling why he believes that prejudices of the sort he describes can be explained by the same principles as all causal judgment. Prejudice is one of the more notorious examples of beliefs based on very little experience. But, in fact, Hume believes there is another, less fundamental, but equally important method of forming causal judgments. Hume calls this an "oblique" or "artificial" method.

Hume first explains the oblique manner of causal inference in section 8. The most fundamental way of producing the customary transition from cause to effect is by experience of past constant conjunction. But, having had experience of causal reasoning in general and recognizing certain principles governing such reasoning, we, in a sense, acquire another, higher-order custom of causally relating objects of which we have had little or no past experience. Inasmuch as this is an important point, I quote Hume at length:

> Even in common life, we may attain knowledge of a particular cause merely by one experiment, provided it be made with judgment, and after careful removal of all foreign and superfluous circumstances. Now as after one experiment of

> this kind, the mind, upon the appearance either of the cause or the effect, can draw an inference concerning the existence of its correlative; and as a habit can never be acquir'd merely by one instance, it may be thought that belief cannot in this case be esteem'd the effect of custom. But this difficulty will vanish, if we consider, that tho' we are here suppos'd to have had only one experiment of a particular effect, yet we have had many millions to convince us of this principle; that like objects plac'd in like circumstances, will always produce like effects; and as this principle has establish'd itself by a sufficient custom, it bestows an evidence and firmness on any opinion to which it can be apply'd. The connexion of ideas is not habitual after one experiment; but this connexion is comprehended under another principle which is habitual....(p. 104-105).

Here Hume is discussing how we can attain knowledge of causes without experiencing past constant conjunction of the objects in question. If we are to avoid error, it is important that such judgments be made only after the "removal of all foreign and superfluous circumstances". But the point of interest at present is not how we make correct causal judgments after merely one experiment, but, rather, how we form prejudices after one experiment. The answer is that after experiencing one (or a few) cases of conjunction, which does not itself establish a custom, we rely on a higher-order custom established by our long experience of causal reasoning. In other words, we learn to guide our judgment by causal principles.

In the discussion of the probability of causes, Hume makes the same point. Initially our causal beliefs arise from experienced constant conjunctions. But, while this way of forming beliefs is "first in order ... no one, who has arriv'd at the age of maturity, can any longer be acquainted with it"(p. 131). But the time we have become mature (experienced) reasoners we have come to recognize certain general principles involved in making causal inferences and have acquired the higher order custom of connecting objects according to this custom.

> The mind, having form'd another observation concerning the connexion of causes and effects, gives new force to its reasoning from that observation; and by means of it can build an argument on one single experiment, when duly prepar'd and examin'd. What we have found once to follow from any object, we conclude will for ever follow from it; and if this maxim be not always built upon as certain, 'tis not for want of a sufficient number of experiments, but because we frequently meet with instances to the contrary....(p. 131).

The causes of prejudice Hume describes are not explained merely by the fact that they result from causal inference made in this "oblique" manner. As Hume points out, this is the most common method of making causal inferences among experienced reasoners. But his descriptions of this process have been of its legitimate employment. Thus, in both passages cited, he is careful to point out that care

must be taken to insure that such inferences be "made with judgment, and after careful removal of all foreign and superfluous circumstances"(p. 104). Prejudices result from the improper or "rash" employment of general rules, ignoring these important conditions.

The rash formation of general rules is not simply a case of hasty generalization, as in, "A is B; therefore all A are B". The problem lies in the failure to attend to the complexity of the causal circumstances. Simply adding more instances of A's that are B's may not result in a better judgment. And, as Hume has noted, when we do attend to the complexity of these circumstances, one instance may provide an adequate basis for generalization.

Experienced reasoners are accustomed to forming causal judgments in an oblique manner. After a certain amount of experience in the world we assume that, at least in general, things have causes. (According to Hume, it is only those who think philosophically or scientifically who assume that everything has a cause, cf. p. 132). Suppose we meet someone who is quite witless. The imagination causally associates certain other features of the man with his witlessness. This is not a reflective process; the imagination naturally associates these features. But the association is to some extent rule-governed. The association is not made simply by the experience of repeated past conjunction, but, instead, by the unreflective employment of causal principles. The

problem lies in a failure to distinguish complexities in the causal circumstances. The feature we note about the man is that he is Irish. But he may also be uneducated, ill, senile, etc. We are not careful to note and separate the essential from the superfluous circumstances.

Our ability to make such distinctions depends on our general experience of causal reasoning and on our judiciousness as reasoners. These in turn depend on our ability to employ properly formed general rules. But, before discussing the nature of properly formed rules, let me return for a moment to rashly formed rules.

Hume believes that careful attention must be given to the complexity of the causal circumstances to avoid errors in judgment, which result from a natural propensity of the imagination.

> When the superfluous circumstances surrounding the cause are numerous, and remarkable, and frequently conjoined with the essential, they have such an influence on the imagination, that even in the absense of the latter they carry us on to the conception of the usual effect....(p. 148).

Having causally associated a certain complex 'object', for example, (A[1]&A[2]), with a certain effect, B, we are led to judge B upon the experience of either A[1] or A[2], even though A[2] is in fact superfluous. This propensity of the imagination is, in turn, an instance of a more general pro-

pensity: "When an object appears that resembles any cause in very considerable circumstances, the imagination naturally carries us to a lively conception of the usual effect..."(p. 150). Having established a transition between X, where X=(A[1]&A[2]), and Y, upon experiencing A[2], which resembles X, we judge Y.

Hume has not yet specified what basic causal principles guide our 'higher order' judgments. Yet simply examining the judgments we do in fact make and drawing up a list of rules implicit in such judgments would not seem to provide us with a normative guide for making causal judgments. Hume's discussion of the unphilosophical probabilities shows that he believed that many judgments we make, while fully explicable according to the general principles of our understanding, are illegitimate.
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Throughout his discussion of the unphilosophical probabilities, Hume is clearly assuming some standards by which we judge such probabilities illegitimate. Equally clearly, such standards cannot be the kind invoked by Descartes and Malebranche. The standards must be derivable from and explicable within Hume's system, and, according to Hume's system, all of our causal judgments depend on the customary transition of the imagination. There is an obvious problem of how to distinguish (or why we should distinguish) between legitimate and illegitimate judgments. Hume states the

problem as follows:

> According to my system, all reasonings are nothing but the effects of custom; and custom has no influence, but by inlivening the imagination, and giving us a strong conception of any object. It may, therefore, be concluded, that our judgment and imagination can never be contrary, and that custom cannot operate on the latter faculty after such a manner, as to render it opposite to the former.(p. 149)

If, within Hume's system, all judgments are based on natural propensities of the imagination, how can he maintain that our "judgment" corrects the propensities of the imagination?

Hume believes that we correct judgments made according to the unphilosophical probabilities by appeal to what he calls "general rules by which to judge of cause and effect", which are discovered by reflecting on past judgments. They are rules, "by which we ought to regulate our judgments concerning causes and effects"(p. 145, emp. mine).

To solve the problem Hume appeals to a "second influence" of general rules. Hume refers the reader ahead to section 15 where he cites eight rules for guiding causal judgments. Commenting on these rules Hume says:

> Here is all the LOGIC I think proper to employ in my reasoning; and perhaps even this was not very necessary, but might have been supplied by the natural principles of our understanding. Our scholastic headpieces and logicians shew no such superiority above the mere vulgar in their reason and ability, as

> to give us any inclination to imitate them in delivering a long system of rules and precepts to direct our judgment, in philosophy. All the rules of this nature are easy in their invention, but extremely difficult in their application....(p. 175)[2]

Thus, we correct judgments made according to rashly formed general rules (and other unphilosophical probabilities) by employing these general rules by which to judge of causes and effects. But Hume does not claim merely that we do in fact correct our judgments according to these rules. What, then, distinguishes the general rules by which we ought to regulate our judgment from general rules rashly formed to ourselves? According to Hume the rules that we ought to use in regulating our judgments are "form'd on the nature of the understanding and our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects. By them we learn to distinguish accidental circumstances from efficacious causes"(p. 149). How are such rules "form'd on the nature of the understanding"? Hume's account of the "opposition" of general rules is helpful here:

> When an object appears, that resembles any cause in any considerable circumstances, the imagination naturally carries us to a lively conception of its usual effect, tho' the object be different in the most material and most efficacious circumstances from that cause. Here is the first influence of general rules. But when we take a review of this act of mind, and compare it with the more general and authentic op-

> erations of the understanding, we find it to be of an irregular nature, and destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasoning; which is the cause of our rejecting it. This is the second influence of general rules, and implies the condemnation of the former. Sometimes the one, sometimes the other prevails, according to the disposition and character of the person. The vulgar are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second.(p. 149).

Again, suppose we meet a man who is witless. Reasoning in an "oblique" manner we causally associate a certain feature of this man (his Irishness) with witlessness. Upon meeting another man, we note this same feature, establishing a resemblance between him and the first man. We then expect the same "effect" and conclude that he too will be witless, although he is "different in the most material and most efficacious circumstances" from the first man. This is the first influence of general rules. If we examine this judgment, we note that it involves making a causal judgment without distinguishing the type of resemblance involved. We thereby expect the same effect. To analyze this mistake in judgment assumes we have some standards for determining correct causal judgments. These standards are implicit in the "more general and authentic operation of the understanding". Thus, by comparing the judgment formed according to rashly formed general rules to our "authentic" judgments, we recognize the former as "irregular ... and destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasoning..."(p. 150).

According to Hume, the standards implicit in our "general and authentic" judgments are the eight rules for judging causes and effects. These rules are formed by reflection on our experience of past judgments. Some of our past judgments have been true, others false. After a certain amount of experience we are able to discern the principles governing true judgments. Thus, the rules for judging causes and effects are taken as standards of causal judgment because they are the rules implicit in our past true judgments.[3]

A natural question to raise at this point is how we distinguish between true and false judgments. While Hume clearly held a correspondence theory of truth (cf. p. 448), he took the general ability to make our experience coherent as indication of the truth of judgments. But Hume's view on this issue can only be understood within the context of his particular brand of skepticism and I want to postpone the discussion of that topic until the next chapter. What is important for the present discussion is Hume's belief that by reflecting on past judgments we are able to discern certain principles involved in our successful judgments. The degree to which we will be able to discern these principles will depend on our experience and education. Consider Hume's comments from section 7:

> A peasant can give no better reason for

> the stopping of any clock or watch than to say, that commonly it does not go right: But an artizan easily perceives, that the same force in the spring or pendulum has always the same influence on the wheels; but fails of its usual effect, perhaps by reason of a grain of dust, which puts a stop to the whole movement. From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim, that the connection betwixt all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes.(p. 132).

Those of the most limited experience and education are least able to discern the general principles involved in successful judgments. Thus the "vulgar", following the natural propensities of the imagination, "are commonly guided by the first [influence of general rules]"(p. 150). The philosopher is supposed to have, not only far more extensive and diverse experience than the peasant, but also, through education, to have access to the 'experience' of a wide range of other people both past and present. In recognizing the principles involved in successful judgments, he is able to establish general rules for guiding causal judgments. Thus, the "wise" are guided by the second influence of general rules.

One must take care in distinguishing between "wise" and "vulgar" reasoners. The difference is not between those who make judgments according to natural propensities and those who do not. According to Hume, <u>all</u> judgments are made ac-

cording to natural propensities. This applies to the judgments of the "wise" reasoner in two respects. First, the general rules used by such reasoners are based on natural propensities discovered by reflection on past judgments. Thus, these rules are simply standards developed from the natural principles implicit in our successful judgments. They are not standards based on rational insight into the "essence" of objects, or on innate ideas or any other rationalistic criteria.

Second, if we examine the reasoning involved in deriving these general rules, we will discover a familiar pattern. To determine which of the principles employed in our past judgments ought to regulate our judgments, "our reason must be considered as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect..."(p. 180). We take past judgments as objects in our experience and note that some of the objects are constantly conjoined with truth. While this is a somewhat awkward way of speaking, Hume's point is clear. General rules are formed by examining past judgments. We are able to sort these objects into types according to their success or failure. This, in turn, allows us to discover principles involved in the successful judgments. We then judge that all judgments of this type will be successful. The inference involved in making this judgment is as follows:

> Judgments of type (A-->B) have been constantly conjoined with success in past experience.
>
> Judgments of type (A-->B) will always be successful.

According to Hume, such inferences are "not founded on reasoning or on any process of the understanding".[4] They are based on the customary transition of the imagination--a natural propensity. Hume concludes:

> Mean while the sceptics amy here have the pleasure of observing a new and signal contradiction in our reason, and of seeing all philosophy ready to be subverted by a principle of human nature, and again sav'd by a new direction of the very same principle. The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities.(p. 150)

There is one further aspect of Hume's basic account of general rules that deserves emphasis. This involves the difference between imagination and judgment. The general rules for judging causes and effects were introduced to explain how there can be a conflict between imagination and judgment when, according to Hume's system, all judgments are derived from the imagination. It is important to keep in mind a certain ambiguity in the use of the word 'imagination'. To say that a judgment is based on the imagination need not imply that it is illegitimate. As was shown in

Chapter I, 'imagination' is a technical term referring to the faculty by which we form and unite ideas. But we also distinguish between good and bad reasoning and mark this distinction by attributing bad reasoning to "mere imagination" and good reasoning to "judgment". Here we use 'imagination' to refer to the more frivolous workings of the imagination. In section 11 Hume acknowledges this ambiguity:

> In general we may observe, that as our assent to all probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being offspring of the imagination. By this expression it appears that the work, imagination, is commonly us'd in two different senses; and tho'nothing be more contrary to true philosophy, than this inaccuracy, yet in the following reasoning I have often been oblig'd to fall into it. When I oppose imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings.(p. 117-18n)

To oppose judgment to imagination is not to suppose that there is a faculty of judgment entirely distinct from the faculty of imagination, that is, the faculty by which we form our fainter ideas. In this sense, "the memory, senses, and understanding [judgment] are ... all of them founded on the imagination..."(p. 265). The distinction between judg-

ment and imagination is between those judgments based on the "more extensive and constant" operations of the understanding and those judgments based on the "more capricious and uncertain" operations of the understanding (p. 149). But the fact that the difference is a matter of degree does not mean that each should have equal authority (or no authority) in guiding our judgments.

Hume defends the distinction in justifying his criticism of the ancient philosophers. These philosophers, Hume claims, "were guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination..."(p. 224). But, if all of our reasoning is in fact guided by the imagination, then this would not seem a particularly telling criticism. Hume justifies the criticism as follows:

> It may be objected, that the imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the ancient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings. In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effect, and from effects to causes; And the principles, which are changeable, weak and irregular.... The former are the foundation of all our thought and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life....(p. 225)

Hume is not eliminating the distinction between judgment and imagination. What he is doing is, in effect, redefining the distinction. One of Hume's major tasks was the debunking of the traditional views of the nature of judgment. But to deny that such views are correct is not to deny that there is such a thing as judgment, which can be distinguished from 'mere' imagination. Throughout his works Hume constantly distinguishes between conclusions which can be "justly" drawn and those that cannot; between "wise" and "judicious" reasoning and "foolish" and "vulgar" reasoning. There are, then, standards for distinguishing between good reasoning or "judgment" and bad reasoning or "imagination" and to adhere to these standards is to make rational judgments. Likewise, there are standards for moral judgments and to adhere to such standards is to judge morally. The standards are embodied in general rules; thus, to guide our judgments according to general rules is to make rational judgments.

Clearly a lot more needs to be said about the normative authority of general rules. I have indicated that this authority is related to our experience of what sorts of judgments are likely to lead to truth. This raises questions of justification and the relationship between Hume's theory of general rules and his skepticism. The next chapter is devoted to these issues. But before turning to that

topic, I want briefly to discuss Thomas Hearn's account of Hume on general rules. This is the only thorough discussion of the subject known to me. Though I have profited from reading his discussion, I think it has certain shortcomings which deserve to be pointed out.

The central features of Hearn's account are as follows: There are two different types of general rules. The first type "describes a propensity of the imagination to extend the scope of judgments formed in one set of circumstances to other resembling but non-identical circumstances".[5] The second type "function to correct certain natural propensities which result in erroneous belief or action if permitted to operate unchecked."[6] According to Hearn, these two types of general rule are very different. Those of the first type involve the propensity of the imagination to generalize and are the source of illegitimate judgments. Those of the second type are not the result of mere propensities of the imagination; they are "rules of the understanding" and are "corrective, reflective and directive".[7] They are corrective in serving to correct natural propensities; they are reflective in being "consciously formulated and adopted."[8] They are directive in having normative authority: "we 'ought' to follow them and failure to do so is a potential source of error."[9]

The formation of the first type of general rule is

"explicable in terms of the familiar Humean principles of resemblance".[10] The second type of general rules is formulated "by reflecting on the nature of our mental activities and operations".[11] According to Hearn, "the outcome of this reflection is the formation of rules by use of which ... correction occurs".[12] Hearn's description of the formation of the "first sort" of general rules is as follows:

> Let us suppose that C is known to be sufficient and necessary for the production of E. However, when C produces E, it is conjoined with D which is entirely incidental to the production of E. The effect of the conjunction of D with C, however, is that the imagination extends the principle "C causes E" to the resembling circumstances "C and D cause E". The imagination even can be led to expect the production of E when D is present and C absent. This effect on the imagination is what Hume calls the "first influence of general rules".[13]

Hearn has surprisingly little to say about the formation of the "second sort" of general rule. He tells us that they are formed by reflecting on the nature of our mental activities, but he does not attempt to show the structure of this second type of rule as he does with the first type. I believe the failure to do so leads him to overlook an important point which I will discuss below.

What I have been saying here amounts to a very sketchy account of Hearn's view, but it is adequate for purposes of

comparing Hearn's account of the formation of general rules with my own.

The similarities between our accounts are easily stated. We agree that general rules are both the source of illegitimate judgments. We also agree that, in their corrective capacity, general rules are normative. Finally, we agree that normative general rules are derived from reflection on our "mental activities and operations". On the other hand, our differences stem primarily from one fundamental disagreement. While Hearn claims there are two very different types of general rules, I claim there is only one type of general rule. Hearn's reason for insisting that there are two different types of rule is that in one case the rules are the result of mere propensities of the imagination, resulting in illegitimate judgments, while in the other case the rules are the product of the understanding, resulting in legitimate judgments. But this is very misleading. What Hearn calls the "generalizing propensity of the imagination" is simply the imagination's propensity to join ideas by resemblance and custom. According to Hume, these are fundamental natural principles of human thought. Hume was attempting to explain <u>all</u> judgments by means of the same fundamental principles, while at the same time preserving the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate judgments. Clearly the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate judgments

cannot depend on whether or not they result from propensities of the imagination.

As I showed above, the two "operations" of general rules described by Hume are identical in form. In the first case a person has experienced objects of type A constantly conjoined with objects of type B. He is then presented with an object a, which resembles objects of type A. By a customary transition, he forms the idea of an object of type B and this idea is enlivened by the impression of a. He thus judges--or believes--B. In the second case the operations involved are exactly the same. A person has experienced objects of type A (in this case judgments) constantly conjoined with objects of type B (truth). He is then presented with an object a (a particular judgment) which resembles objects of type A. By a customary transition he forms the idea of B and this idea is enlivened by a. To call these two very different types of rules, one based on propensities of the imagination, the other on the understanding, is certainly misleading.

Surprisingly, after distinguishing general rules into two types, Hearn acknowledges that "there is no sense in which these ["reflective"] rules could be other than empirical and, hence, products of probable reason or custom".[14] But, as I noted above, Hearn has little to say about this point and makes no attempt to explain how these rules are

the product of custom. If he had worked this out he might have recognized that, while we attribute prejudice to the imagination and general rules to the judgment, the only distinction is between the more "capricious and uncertain" and the more "extensive and constant" operations of the imagination.

Hume has good reason to insist that the two examples of the operation of general rules involve only the "redirecting" of the "very same principle". It is important to keep in mind the task that Hume is trying to accomplish. He is developing a theory of natural judgments. Part of his project is to uncover the fundamental principles operative in all our judgments. The section on unphilosophical probabilities is meant to support his claim that all judgments are based on the same principles. The unphilosophical probabilities, although not "sanctioned" by philosophers, are in fact "deriv'd from the same principles" as all other probabilities.

Hume is particularly careful to resolve an apparent contradiction in his system. He has claimed that custom is the foundation of all of our judgments and that custom is a propensity of the imagination. Yet he admits that unphilosophical probabilities are an illegitimate method of forming judgments. Doesn't this presuppose that we have a faculty of judgment different from and opposed to the mere propensities of the imagination? Hume's reply is that we do not

need to suppose any separate faculty, although it is natural for us to do so. The criterion for determining the legitimacy of a judgment is whether or not that type of judgment is likely to be true. We determine this by comparing it to past judgments. When it resembles the type of judgments that have been successful in our past experience, we accept it as legitimate; when it is "irregular" we reject it as illegitimate. To correct judgments based on propensities of the imagination we use judgments based on the same propensities. Thus Hume offers a unified theory of natural judgments, which allows for the correction of judgments without appeal to any "pure and intellectual view, of which the superior faculties of the soul are alone capable"(p. 72).

NOTES

[1] The example appears to be from Malebranche:

> "A Frenchman meets an Englishman or an Italian. The foreigner has his own particular humor; he is refined, or, if you wish, vain and disagreeable. This will immediately lead the Frenchman to judge that all Englishmen, or all Italians, have the same character of mind as the one he has met. He praises or condemns them all as a whole, and if he meet another of them, the Frenchman is immediately struck by his being like the one he has already seen, and he gives in to some secret liking or distaste for the man"(Search After Truth III 2.11, 258).

[2] This passage suggests the influence of the Port Royal Logic:

> "In the part of philosophy called, logic, the part devoted to the rules for avoiding errors in reasoning, the philosophers claim to offer us a light capable of dissipating the darkness of the mind. Logic is said to correct all errors of thought and to offer us rules so trustworthy as to lead us infallibly to the truth--a set of rules so necessary that without them to know the truth with complete certainty is impossible. Such are the praises the philosophers bestow on their own precepts. But if we consider the use philosophers have made of their own rules either in logic or in the other branches of philosophy, we shall have good reason to suspect the truth of such premises"(p. 11-12).

[3] Hume's theory of general rules can plausibly be viewed as the working out of a suggestion made in the Port Royal Logic:

> "Sometimes men are mistaken in their judgments, but not always; so man must reason now poorly, now well, and

after reasoning poorly, man is capable of recognizing his error. Reflecting on his own thoughts, he notes the method followed when reasoning well and the cause of error when he is mistaken. Then he can make for himself some rules to avoid future error"(p. 11).

[4] Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 32.

[5] Thomas K. Kearn, "'General Rules' in Hume's Treatise," Journal of the History of Philosophy, 8 (October 1970): 405-406.

[6] Ibid., p. 406.

[7] Ibid., p. 411.

[8] Ibid., p. 410.

[9] Ibid., p. 411.

[10] Ibid., p. 411.

[11] Ibid., p. 412.

[12] Ibid., p. 413.

[13] Ibid., p. 410.

[14] Ibid., p. 413.

C H A P T E R I I I

REASON AND SKEPTICISM

In Chapter II, I examined the structure and formation of general rules. I showed how general rules were meant to provide a purely naturalistic method of regulating and correcting judgments and that Hume believed general rules have normative authority because they embody the standards of rational judgment. In this chapter I want to examine Hume's views on the normative authority of general rules in more detail. I also want to discuss the related topic of the connection between Hume's theory of general rules and his skepticism.

The Normative Authority of General Rules

According to Hume, by examining the "operations of our understanding, and ... our experience of its operation in the judgments we form concerning objects," we learn to separate the "more extensive and constant" operations from the "more capricious and uncertain" operations(p. 149). General rules are formed according to the extensive and constant operations and serve to correct judgments made according to the capricious and uncertain operations. Thus, the steady application of general rules will ensure that all

our judgments will conform to the extensive and constant principles.

Hume clearly believed that it is preferable or more rational to conform our judgments to the more extensive and constant operations of the understanding. We attribute these operations to the judgment, while attributing the capricious operations to the imagination. If we concede this point, then it is clear why we ought to follow general rules. What is not clear is why we should make such a concession. What grounds are there for maintaining that it is more rational to conform our judgments to the more extensive operations of the understanding? We are able to distinguish between the different operations by observing that certain types of judgments have often been false, while other types have often been true. But Hume's discussion of causal inference has shown that there is no justification for the inference from past regularities to future regularities. Thus, the fact that, in the past, judgments made according to the extensive and constant principles have been more often true cannot provide any grounds for inferring that such judgments will continue to be true in the future.

If we cannot show that judgments based on the extensive and constant principles of the imagination will be more likely to turn out true, then what grounds are there for considering such judgments more rational than those based on the capricious and uncertain principles? A number of recent

commentators have noted that Hume persistently advocates the adoption of what we would call "scientific method" and criticizes all manner of "superstitious" reasoning.[1] Some of them have cited the following passage as Hume's attempt to justify the distinction:

> It may here be objected, that the imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the ancient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings. In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles which are changeable, weak, and irregular, such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition.(p. 225)

The traditional method of justifying a judgment is to show that it is formed in accordance with a justified method. A method is justified by showing that it is more likely to result in true judgments. But, given Hume's views on causal inference, he cannot maintain that judgments based

on established principles are more likely to be true. Therefore, he cannot appeal to the traditional grounds to support his claim that it is more rational to guide our judgments according to established principles such as custom. The question, then, is whether Hume can provide any other grounds for this claim.

It is certainly questionable whether the fact that some principles are "permanent, irresistable, and universal", others "weak and irregular" can, in itself, provide any reason for considering the former rational and the latter irrational. Passmore, for instance, clearly maintains that this approach is inadequate:

> "Unphilosophical probability" depends on a trick of the mind; but so does philosophical probability. Why, then, does the philosopher regard them so differently? .... In neither case, on Hume's view, is there any objective implication; in both cases we are led to a certain conclusion as a result of a merely psychological operation....
>
> Is there, then, no difference between these two cases? One difference, Hume again suggests, is that to rely upon unphilosophical probability would be to commit ourselves to an 'irregular' kind of reasoning, which is 'capricious and uncertain' in contrast with the 'extensive and constant' principles of philosophical reasoning (T, 149). But why should we prefer regularity to irregularity? To this the only answer can be, Hume replies, that the 'disposition and character of the person' (T, 150) will determine his preference.[2]

Passmore goes on to point out that this resort to individual psychological preference is worthless in the attempt to justify the distinction between rational and irrational judgments. "The logical problem -- how can empirical reasoning be justified -- vanishes as unanswerable".[3]

I think Passmore is too hasty here. While it is true that this sort of appeal to individual psychology could not support the distinction between rational and irrational judgment, it is not necessarily true, as his discussion in the section seems to suggest, that no appeal to psychology could provide grounds for the distinction. Hume does not claim that the reason (ground) for the distinction is the disposition of the individual. He claims that people are inclined toward one form or the other according to their disposition. This is a different claim altogether. One can admit that whether people choose their winter coats on the basis of warmth or style is often determined by their disposition without concluding that the only grounds for prefering one 'principle' to the other is individual disposition. The same is true of the principles of reasoning.

Hume could argue in the following manner: It is a psychological fact about human beings that they prefer orderly and coherent judgments to disorderly and incoherent judgments. Following the regular and established principles results in orderly and coherent judgments, following weak

and irregular principles results in disorderly and incoherent judgments. People who reason according to weak and irregular principles are irrational because they are thwarting their own aims. They are like people who prefer warmth to style yet, on a sudden impulse, end up buying a flimsy stylish coat.

Numerous passages in the Treatise indicate that Hume believed that "love of order" is inherent in human nature. To note just a few such passages:

> Objects have a certain coherence even as they appear to our senses; but this coherence is much greater and more uniform, if we suppose the objects to have a continu'd existence; and as the mind is once in a train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible.(p. 198)
>
> The mind has a natural propensity to join relations, especially resembling ones, and finds a kind of fitness and uniformity in such an union.(p. 509)
>
> The same love of order and uniformity, which arranges the books in the library, and the chairs in the parlour, contributes to the formation of society....(p. 504)

Although this line of reasoning would provide grounds for maintaining that it is more rational to follow established principles than it is to follow irregular principles, it appears to conflict with certain other of Hume's claims. If the established principles produce orderly judgments and

he irregular judgments do not, and it is a psychological fact that human beings prefer order, then how can Hume explain the fact that many (if not most) of mankind reason according to the irregular principles? Hume notes that "superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind ...," and that for this reason it is more likely to rule the popular imagination.(p. 271) He also claims that the "wise" are generally guided by the established principles, the vulgar by the irregular principles. By the vulgar Hume meant the ignorant and uneducated --in other words, the majority of mankind. The implication is that the majority of mankind guide their judgments according to weak and irregular principles. This is difficult to reconcile with the claim that human beings prefer orderly judgments. The evidence appears to indicate just the opposite.

I think that Hume can answer this sort of criticism by distinguishing between different levels of judgment of belief. Custom is the permanent, irresistable and universal principle underlying all of he most fundamental beliefs of common life. Hume is not referring to our most cherished religious or ideological convictions. He is referring to much more basic beliefs--the types of belief that underlie even our most trivial thoughts and actions. When we get up to answer the door we reveal the belief that the knock was

produced by someone, that our bodies will move as we desire, that the floor will support us, that the door is where we remember it being, and countless other basic beliefs. These sorts of belief are the product of custom and are common to all mankind. Without them our experience would be disconnected and incoherent. Hume makes this point quite clearly in the first Enquiry:

> Custom ... is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we would be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as the chief part of speculation.[4]

Thus, at this basic level of belief, everyone forms judgments according to the established principle of custom. But, at a somewhat more complex level, other natural propensities that are "neither unavoidable ..., nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life" begin to influence judgments. Hume has three different, yet related, criticisms of the irregular principles discernable in the operation of these propensities:

1. Judgments made according to irregular principles are "often contrary to

each other" and lead us to "absurdities and obscurities".(p. 267)

2. Judgments made according to irregular principles are "disruptive of all the most establish'd principles of reasoning".(p. 150)

3. The irregular principles "being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition". (p. 225

According to Hume, we cannot know that beliefs formed according to custom are more likely to be true. Neither can we know that they are more likely to be false. But we do know that principles that lead to judgments that are "often contrary to each other", and lead to "absurdities and obscurities" cannot lead to truth. Hume often refers to the absurdities and contradictions that result from the "trivial propensities of the fancy". The unphilosophical probabilities provide a good example. Because of certain natural propensities, "an experiment, that is fresh in the memory affects us more than one that is in some measure oblit-erated..."(p. 143). When the evidence that smoking is dangerous to my health is fresh in my memory, I judge that smoking is unsafe. When the same evidence is more remote, I judge that smoking is safe. Guiding my judgment by such a principle leads me to form contrary judgments from exactly the same evidence.

Not only do we know that principles that result in

contrary judgments cannot lead to truth, we also know that employing mutually inconsistent principles cannot lead to truth. According to Hume, we all accept and cannot help but accept the basic beliefs of common life. At this level we all employ the egular and established principles. Those who also form beliefs according to weak and irregular principles are following principles that conflict with established principles. The drunkard who lets time weaken his belief that he, like his friend, is in danger of dying of a debauch, employs mutually incompatible principles. When he expects his liquor to pour when he tips his bottle, to feel a warm glow when he drinks and the ground to support him where he lies, he is reasoning according to the established principle of custom. When he allows his belief in his danger to weaken over time he is "reasoning" according to an irregular principle that is "opposite" to custom and "destructive of all the most established principles of reasoning". Given that we cannot give up the established principles, the only consistent course is to give up the weak and irregular principles.

According to Hume, at the level of basic beliefs we are unable to suspend judgment. "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breath and feel..."(p. 183). Neither can we avoid forming beliefs according to custom.

> Nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with the present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine.(p. 183)

Given the facts (1) that judgments formed according to irregular principles will inevitably conflict with judgments made according to established principles then we can avoid "seeing surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine", it follows that judgments formed according to irregular principles will often be unstable. "Being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, [they] may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition"(p. 225).

Not all beliefs that result from irregular principles are unstable, however. In fact, indoctrination, which is the principle that most resembles custom in its operation, often produces remarkably stable beliefs. But, unlike custom, it cannot be consistently employed. No amount of indoctrination will allow us to sustain the belief that placing our hand on a hot stove will not burn, that walking off cliffs is harmless, or that we can breathe water. A belief produced by an irregular principle can remain stable only when it does not conflict (or at least not obviously conflict) with a belief based on custom.

Thus, while Hume admits that we cannot justify custom by showing that it is more likely to lead to true judgments, he does not conclude that there are no grounds for supposing it more rational to form judgments according to custom than to form judgments according to irregular principles.

> While a warm imagination is allow'd to enter into philosophy, and hypotheses embrac'd merely for being specious and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles, nor any sentiments, which will suit with common practice and expe-rience. But were these hypotheses once remov'd, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satis-factory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination.(p. 272)

We now have a clear answer to the question about the normative authority of general rules. Following properly formed general rules will ensure the consistent application of the fundamental principles inherent in our reasoning. These principles are the foundation of our thoughts and actions and it is only be following these principles alone that we can achieve a consistent system of orderly, coherent and stable judgments. Although they cannot be justified in the traditional manner--by showing that following them will result in true judgments--they can be shown to be rationally preferable to irregular principles.

It is interesting to note an important and marked

contrast between Hume and his rationalist predecessors. Descartes and Malebranche considered natural judgments the source of endless error and illusion. According to them, the principles of scientific thinking are discoverable only at the abstract level of thought discoverable in the operation of the intellect, a level seldom achieved by the vulgar. In contrast, Hume maintained that the principles of scientific thinking are inherent in our most basic natural judgments. According to him, when answering the door, preparing a meal, or taking a walk, the most vulgar peasants employ exactly the same principles of reasoning as the most sophisticated philosophers.

> Our scholastic headpieces and logicians shew no such superiority above the mere vulgar in their reason and ability, as to give us any inclination to imitate them in delivering a long system of rules and precepts to direct our judgment, in philosophy.(p. 175)

Although Hume maintains that the principles of good reasoning are inherent in the fundamental beliefs of even the most vulgar reasoner, he does not conclude, to his credit, that the so-called "common sense" views of the vulgar have some sort of prima facie validity. He argues that many such beliefs are simply false. But this is not inconsistent with the view that the principles of scientific thinking are inherent in the basic beliefs of the vulgar. The difference between the reasonings of the vulgar and the

reasonings of the true philosopher is in methodology. Scientific method requires the consistent application of the "permanent, irresistable, and universal" principles inherent in the judgments of common life. The decisions of the true philosopher--the scientific thinker--"are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected".[5]

The Skeptical Limits of General Rules

Hume develops his views on the relationship between reason, general rules and skepticism in two sections fo Book I of the Treatise: Part 4, section 1, "Of scepticism with regard to reason", and Part 4, section 7, "Conclusion of this book". In the first of these sections Hume attempts to show how, by consistently adhering to the prescriptions of reason, we will be led inevitably to skepticism about reason itself. In the latter section Hume offers what Robert Fogelin has aptly called his "skeptical conclusion" to these doubts.[6]

For convenience, I will divide the section "Of scepticism" into three parts. In the first part Hume advances a two-stage skeptical argument purporting to show (1) that "all knowledge degenerates into probability" and, (2) that, by following our reason, all probability is "reduc'd to nothing". In the second part of the section, Hume links

this argument to his theory of belief, first by claiming that our failure to follow reason in forming our beliefs supports his theory that "belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures", and, second, by offering a psychophysiological explanation of why we are unable to follow reason. In the third part of the section, Hume turns his attention from the psychological to the philosophical conclusions to be drawn from the argument in the first part. He concludes that, by refusing to be influenced by the principles that our reason explicitly condemns, we will inevitably undermine the authority of reason.

There are two features of Hume's argument in the first part of the section that link it directly to the subject of general rules. First, in illustrating how knowledge reduces to probability, Hume shows how demonstrative reasoning comes under the influence of general rules. Second, he sows how reason subverts itself by extending the application of general rules beyond their natural scope. The first stage Hume describes as follows:

> In all demonstrative sciences the rules[7] are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error. We must, therefore, in every reasoning form a new judgment as a check of controul on our first judgment or belief; and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of

> history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true. Our reason must be consider'd a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.(p. 180)

However "infallible" the rules of demonstration may be, experience teaches us that we make mistakes in our demonstrative reasoning. "There is no Algebraist or Mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it..."(p. 180); not because he has any doubts about the truths of mathematics, but because he recognizes the possibility of errors in his judgments. Our experience of errors in demonstrative judgments does not lead us to doubt the principles of mathematics but, rather, our ability to correctly apply such principles in our judgments. A simple example illustrates Hume's point. Suppose I want to write a check for $135.00. I consult my check register and note a balance of $136.08. Knowing that I have often miscalculated and not wanting to overdraw my account, I recheck my figures. If I arrive at the same balance my confidence increases; if I arrive at a different balance my confidence decreases.

I recalculated my balance because I am in doubt about my original judgment, not because I have any doubts about mathematics. I do not believe that, say, 7+5 does not always equal 12. What I do believe is that I do not always judge that 7+5=12. Thus, my belief that my balance is $135.08 is tempered by considering the nature of my judgment. This tempering of belief is the result of a general rule of judgment: "We must ... in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief...(p. 180). It is a general rule of judgment in two senses: it is a rule formed by judgment and a rule applicable to judgments.

A possible objection to Hume's claim that (if we are reasonable) we ought to "form a new judgment as a check or controul on our first judgment" is that in the majority of what we consider perfectly reasonable judgments we do no such thing. I believe (judge) that I am sitting in this chair, drinking coffee, hearing someone upstairs, and so on. In making these judgments I do not consider the history of my judgments about such matters and adjust my current beliefs to reflect the proportion of past cases where I have been mistaken. It is only in exceptional cases that I engage in such an examination of past judgments. While this objection is, I believe, ill-founded, it is useful in directing attention to the subtilty of Hume's view. His

point does not require that in each judgment we consciously or explicitly consider our failures and successes in past judgments. What is important is that upon analyzing our judgments we discover that our degree of belief is regulated by a general rule. Once we recognize he rule we can apply it with more consistency than is apt to occur naturally.

Consider my check register example. While in certain circumstances I might consciously reflect on my "history" of check register judgments, for the most part I simply accept whatever balance I initially arrive at, but with limited confidence. I do not have much conviction in my judgment. My low degree of belief is reflected in other judgments, which depend on this one, and in my actions. I am wary of writing checks for the full amount of my balance and recheck my figures before doing so. I am not surprised when my bank statement shows a different balance from my register and, unless I have just checked my balance against the bank statement, I certainly would not place a wager on my balance being $136.08.

It is perfectly conceivable that all this could be true whether or not I had ever consciously reflected on my past judgments. The modification of belief is the natural effect of certain occurrences in my past experience (bad judgments). Our judgments are as much a part of our past experience as the objects of these judgments. As the result of our past success and failure in judging, we begin to have

different degrees of confidence in our present judgments. The effect of my past failures at mathematical judgments will, then, be reflected in my lower degree of confidence in my present judgment. The extent to which present judgments will reflect the influence of general rules depends on the experience and intelligence of the judger:

> A man of solid sense and long experience ought to have, and usually has, a greater assurance in his opinions, than one who is foolish and ignorant.... Our sentiments have different degrees of authority, even with ourselves, in proportion to the degrees of our reason and experience. (p. 182)

In Chapter II, I explained Hume's view of how our judgments about objects are regulated by general rules formed according to our past experience of objects. These judgments are, in turn, regulated by general rules formed according to our past experience in making judgments. In this section Hume is extending the scope of general rules by viewing demonstrative judgments as objects of experience, thus incorporating them into his standard pattern of causal inference. Whether the subject matter of the judgments is causal relations or mathematics, the judgments themselves show various degrees of regularity in their "conjunction" with truth. We will expect a judgment to be true, i.e., believe it, to the extent that that sort of judgment has been true in our past experience. The more experience we

have had and, no doubt, the better our natural capacities, the more our past experience of judgments is reflected in our present judgments. The modification of belief according to general rules is, then, a natural causal process. Hume indicates the causal structure of this process in the following passage:

> I suppose, there is some question propos'd to me, and that after revolving over the impressions of my memory and senses, and carrying my thoughts from them to such objects, as are commonly conjoin'd with them, I feel a stronger and more forcible conception on the one side, than on the other, This strong conception forms my first decision. I suppose, that afterwards I examine my judgment itself, and observing from experience, that 'tis sometimes just and sometimes erroneous, I consider it as regulated by contrary principles or causes, of which some lead to truth, and some to error; and in ballancing these contrary causes, I diminish by a new probability the assurance of my first decision.(p. 184-85)

The "natural effect" of judgment is truth. But this effect is not produced with complete regularity. We are confronted with what Hume elsewhere calls a "contrariety" in our past experience. In the section on probability of causes, he claims that the natural effect of a contrariety in past experience is to "give us a kind of hesitating belief for he future..."(p. 132). The modification of our present judgment is the "hesitating belief" produced by the

contrariety in our experience of past judgments.

It is significant that the natural causal process is confined to the initial judgment about the object and the second judgment about the initial judgment. We do not naturally go on to form a third judgment to correct the second judgment. According to Hume, after the first and second judgments "the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural..."(p. 185). But our reason does not let us stop with the second decision. Seeking truth and recognizing that following general rules is a means of correcting judgment, reason demands that we extend the rule beyond its natural scope. After the first two judgments:

> We are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. This is a doubt which immediately occurs to us, and of which, if we woul'd closely pursue our reason, we cannot avoid giving a decision.(p. 182).

According to Hume, rational judgment requires the adoption of a certain methodology--the consistent application of the "permanent, irresistable and universal" principles inherent in the judgments of common life. We ensure the consistent application of these principles only be conforming our judgment to general rules. To apply these rules in a haphazard fashion would, it appears, be inconsistent with rational methodology. Reason, therefore, requires us to

apply the general rules to all judgments. The result of reflecting on the errors in our past judgments is to reduce our initial confidence in our present judgment. "When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the object concerning which I reason"(p. 183).

If we were to follow the demands of reason and weigh into every judgment an estimation of the veracity of our past judgments we would get the following results: Our initial judgment is made with a degree of confidence determined by the nature of the object judged. Applying the general rule, we consider past errors in judgments and our confidence in the original judgment is diminished. This consideration of past errors is itself a judgment and, in order to meet the demands of reason, we must again apply the general rule diminishing our confidence in this second judgment. Inasmuch as our confidence in the initial judgment depends on our confidence in the second judgment, by lowering our confidence in the second judgment we diminish still further our conviction in the initial judgment. Our original conviction in the initial judgment will continue to diminish with each successive judgment. "Let our first belief be never so strong, it must infallibly perish by passing thro' so many many new examinations, of which each diminishes somewhat of its force and vigour"(p. 183) The final result of following reason is "a total extinction of

belief and evidence"(p. 183).

Inasmuch as this argument has been the subject of numerous and diverse criticisms, it will be worthwhile to examine it more closely. Hume presents it as follows:

> Having thus found in every probability, beside the original uncertainty inherent in the subject, a new uncertainty deriv'd from the weakness of that faculty, which judges, and having adjusted these two together, we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. This is a doubt, which immediately occurs to us, and of which, if we wou'd closely pursue our reason, we cannot avoid giving a decision. But this decision, tho' it shou'd be favourable to our preceding judgment, being founded only on a probability, must weaken still further our first evidence, and must itself be weaken'd by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum*; till at last there remains nothing of the original probability, however great we may suppose it to have been, and however small the diminution by every new uncertainty.(p. 182)

For clarity, I will first present the basic form of the argument and then examine each step in more detail. The basic form seems to be this: I judge "A" with, say, 90% conviction.[8] I then assess my ability to make judgments of type A and judge "B"--that my judgments of type "A" are, say, 90% reliable. This reduces my initial conviction in judgment "A" to 90x90 or 81% conviction. I then assess my

ability to make judgments of type "B" and judge "C"--that my judgments of type B are only 90% reliable. Hume claims that this reduces my conviction in "A" still further. Although he does not describe just how this occurs, he appears to have in mind the following process:

When we first make judgment "B" we make it with some particular degree of conviction. (I have supposed this to be 90%). But when we examine judgment "B" (make judgment "C") we recognize that judgments of type B are only about 90% reliable and this reduces our conviction in judgment "B" to 90x90 or 81%. Inasmuch as our conviction in "A" depends upon our conviction in "B" we must now reassess our conviction in "A" from 90x90 to 90x81 or 73%. This same process occurs when we examine judgment "C" (make judgment "D"). Noting that judgments of type C are only 90% reliable we reduce our initial conviction in "C" to 90x90 or 81%. But judgment "B" depends upon judgment "C". So we must reassess our initial conviction in judgment in "B" (90%) to 90x81 or 73%. Our conviction in "A" (90%) must be reassessed in light of our corrected degree of conviction in "B" (73%) and our conviction in "A" is further reduced to 90x73 or 66%. With each new judgment the original conviction in "A" is further reduced until there is what Hume calls "a total extinction of belief and evidence".

Reviewing the argument, we first note that, having already shown how our conviction in demonstrative judgments

is reduced, Hume begins with a "probable" judgment--one in which, given the nature of the object, we judge with less than complete certainty. Inasmuch as a judgment of matter of fact is, in Hume's sense, a probable judgment, suppose that my initial judgment is "that is red" and that I judge this with 90% conviction. According to Hume, if I am reasonable, then I should also take into account the reliability of my judgment in such matters or, more specifically, I ought to proportion my degree of conviction in this judgment according to my past experience of the veracity of my color judgments. Here, I think, Hume is clearly correct, for, if I deny that my performance in judging colors is relevant in determining my degree of conviction in my present judgment, then there is no reason why I should not remain fully convinced that I have correctly judged an object as red even if I have always been mistaken in such judgments in the past. But to any reasonable person this would be taken as good evidence that I lack the ability to identify red. If I remained confident in my judgment that "that is red" under such circumstances I would, quite rightly, be considered a fool.

Even if we concede Hume's point here a very plausible objection might still be raised. We are supposing that my initial conviction in my judgment is 90% and that judgments of this sort are 90% reliable. Shouldn't we say that my

actual degree of conviction (90%) is appropriate for judgments of this sort (90% reliable) and that no further reduction is required? To answer this objection one need only point out that it merely skips the first step of Hume's argument by assuming that the reliability of our judgments of objects has already been weighed into the initial judgment. This is merely to make implicit a step that Hume makes explicit. But whether the application of the rule is explicit or implicit makes no difference to Hume's argument. If we suppose that my initial judgment is made with 90% conviction in part <u>because</u> my past judgments of this sort have been 90% reliable, then my degree of belief depends on a judgment about the reliability of my judgments of this sort just as surely as it would if I had made two separate judgments. But if my initial conviction rests in part on the assumption that judgments of this sort are 90% reliable, then it is still legitimate to question my conviction in the argument.

Assessing my past performance in color judgments requires a judgment about a matter of fact, which I determine by consulting my past experience. I find that my judgments of this sort are 90% reliable and adjust my original conviction to reflect this fact. I am, then, 90x90 certain that "that is red". At this point Hume claims that we are "oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth

and fidelity of our faculties". In other words, reason demands that I take into account the reliability of my judgment about my color judgments. This is simply to employ the same principle I employed in my previous judgment. Furthermore, Hume appears to be correct in his claim that reason demands this, for the circumstances that led me to adopt the principle in my judgments about objects are exactly the same in my judgments about my judgments.

When I judge that "that is red" I consider it an indication of my good sense that I take into account the reliability of my judgment in such matters and determine my conviction in the judgment accordingly. But what basis do I have for simply accepting such matters without taking into account my ability to make judgments about my judgments? Isn't this to accept a judgment as reliable without appeal to any empirical evidence which might support or contradict this fact? This is just the sort of thing that was deemed unreasonable in my judgments about objects, so why should it be considered any more reasonable in my judgments about judgments?

In fact, if we examine the evidence, it seems clear that people's judgments about their judgments are as prone to error as their judgments about objects. Given certain human foibles, we might not be inclined to notice this in ourselves, but we certainly do not fail to notice it in

others. Some people believe that they have very good judgment when, in fact, the evidence points to just the opposite conclusion. There are people who consider themselves good judges of character when they are not, people who consider themselves good judges of art when they are not, people who consider themselves good logicians when they are not, and so on. There are also people who err in just the opposite way; those who consider themselves to have poor judgment when, in fact, the evidence points to just the opposite conclusion. From these general considerations regarding the reliability of people's judgments about their judgments it certainly seems that reason does demand that we consider the reliability of our judgment about our judgments in order to determine the proper degree of conviction we should have in such judgments.

If I apply this to the case in question, then it appears that I am obliged by reason to evaluate the reliability of my judgment about my color judgment. This is a matter of fact that must be decided according to experience. But here I might point out the following problem to Hume: I have never made any judgments about the reliability of my judgments about color judgment, so there is no evidence to which I can appeal. Therefore, I have no way of continuing my evaluations and the regress must come to a stop. I think Hume would have a ready reply to this. If I have no evidence to support the reliability of a certain type of

judgment, then I have no basis for any conviction in that type of judgment. To acknowledge that I have no evidence to support my conviction is to acknowledge that my conviction is unwarranted. I cannot reasonably assign a very high degree of conviction to an unwarranted judgment; therefore, I should reduce my conviction in the judgment I make about my ability to make color judgments and, according to Hume, this will lead to further reduction in my conviction in my previous judgments.

I might also appeal to the more general consideration about the reliability of judgments about judgments mentioned above. Considerations such as these incline me to think that whatever the degree of reliability of my judgment about my color judgment, it is not likely to be any greater than that of my other types of judgments. But if I reduce my conviction in this judgment in any way this should, in turn, reduce my conviction in my initial judgment.

The same considerations are going to apply to this last judgment, requiring me to make another judgment about a judgment under virtually identical circumstances. Thus I will have no better grounds for conviction in its reliability than I had in the reliability of the previous judgment. This should reduce my initial conviction still further and so on for each new judgment. So it appears that, by following the perfectly rational method of proportioning my

conviction to the evidence, I will completely undermine my initial belief. Inasmuch as the argument is perfectly general, it would appear that the consistent application of rational method would undermine all belief.

I have presented Hume's argument in some detail because I believe that, through their misinterpretations of the argument, many commentators have underestimated its importance. A discussion of the various misinterpretations and criticisms would constitute a major digression at this point; therefore, I deal with them in the Appendix. Here I want to concentrate on the argument's relation to Hume's view of rational methodology. This requires an examination of the second and third part of the section.

Having argued that reason, "closely pursued", will "utterly subvert all belief and opinion", Hume next links the argument to his theory of belief. The fact that we "continue to believe, and think and reason as usual", even though we are unable to discover any error in his argument, proves that "belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception, which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflection to destroy"(p. 184). If we are free to form our beliefs according to our reflections, then we cannot explain why we maintain our beliefs when our reflections dictate that we abandon them. On the other hand, if belief is the effect of experience--a lively idea related to a present impression--then the failure of "mere ideas" to influence

beliefs is explicable.

Hume recognized that even if we accept this theory of belief there is another factor that must be explained. Why should we be any more likely to retain any degree of conviction in our judgments given Hume's theory of belief than we would on the rival thoery of belief?

> For as these new probabilities, which by their repetition perpetually diminish the original evidence, are founded on the very same principles, whether of thought or sensation, as the primary judgment, it may seem unavoidable, that in either case they must equally subvert it....(p. 184)

Following reason in the form of general rules developed from our past experience effects our initial beliefs. If Hume is correct in his explanation of the principles by which such beliefs are effected, why shouldn't these principles continue to effect our beliefs in our higher order judgments, reducing us to total skepticism? Hume explains this by appeal to psychophysiological mechanisms:

> After the first and second decision: as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgment, and the ballancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and the vigour they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal. Where the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same

> effect as in a more natural conception of the ideas; nor does the imagination feel a sensation, which holds any proportion with that which arises from its common judgments and opinions. The attention is on the stretch: The posture of the mind is uneasy; and the spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern'd in their movements by the same laws, at least not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel.(p. 185)

Thus Hume claims that his thoery explains both why the principles of reason cannot produce belief beyond a certain point and why the mere ideas of reason cannot influence our beliefs.

In the final part of the section Hume turns his attention from the psychological to the philosophical conclusions to be drawn from the argument of the first part. According to Hume, if we follow our reason we will destroy all belief and conviction, including the beliefs that following our reason leads to truth. Thus, consistently adhering to reason must inevitably lead to skepticism about reason itself. What Hume has in mind appears to be this: We can reason only insofar as we maintain certain beliefs. If we reject one belief it is only on the basis of some other belief.[9] If all beliefs are destroyed, then we no longer have any beliefs with which to reason. Furthermore, in eliminating all beliefs, we also eliminate the belief that following reason is in any way preferable to following the mere suggestions of the imagination. But without this

belief reason loses all claim to authority. Thus, if following reason would ultimately lead to the destruction of all belief, then following reason would ultimately lead to the destruction of reason itself.

The response of the dogmatic defender of reason to skeptical arguments is that such arguments are self-defeating. Any argument against reason must derive all its force from the authority of reason. The skeptic must presuppose the very authority he denies: "If the sceptical reasonings be strong, say they, 'tis proof, that reason must have some force and authority; if weak, they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions of our understanding"(p. 186). Hume denies that the skeptical position can be so easily dismissed. Skeptical arguments may destroy themselves, but not without first destroying reason:

> Reason first appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims, with an absolute sway and authority. Her enemy, therefore, is oblig'd to take shelter under her protection, and by making use of rational arguments to prove the fallaciousness and imbecility of reason, produces, in a manner, a patent under her hand and seal. This patent has at first an authority, proportion'd to the present and immediate authority of reason, from which it is deriv'd. But as it is supos'd to be contradictory to reason, it gradually diminishes the force of that governing power, and its own at the same time; till at last they both vanish away into nothing, by a regular and just diminution.(p. 186-87).

The claim that skeptical arguments are self-destructive is true, but this does not help the dogmatist's position. The skeptical arguments are the arguments of reason; thus the dogmatist must concede that reason is self-destructive. Hume concludes:

> 'Tis happy, therefore, that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding. Were we to trust entirely to their self-destruction, that can never take place, 'till they have first subverted all conviction, and have totally destroy'd human reason.(p. 187)

Hume evaluates the conclusion reached in this section in Part 4, section 7, "Conclusion of this book". We seem to be faced with the following dilemma: We can "reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding". But, as Hume has already shown, this move would be disasterous.

> I have already shewn, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life.(pp. 267-68)

Such a result is avoided only by the operation of a "seemingly trivial propensity of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things..."(p.

268).

On the other hand, if these considerations lead us to yield to the propensities of the imagination and reject all "refin'd or elaborate reasonings", the consequences would be equally disasterous.

> If we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become asham'd of our credulity. Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers.(p. 267)

By allowing ourselves to be guided by mere imagination we would "cut off entirely all science and philosophy" and leave ourselves prey to all manner of superstition. Finally, we would be guilty of the "express contradiction" of accepting an argument produced by reason in order to condemn all arguments produced by reason. It would appear that our only choice is between "a false reason and none at all"(p. 268), yet neither position is rationally defensible.

Hume suggests a compromise. We should grant a limited authority to reason, following it only when it works in connection with some natural propensity. "Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it can never have nay title to operate upon us"(p. 270). Hume's claim here is not

simply that reason, in fact, fails to influence us beyond this point. His claim is that reason has no "title" (right) to influence us beyond this point. It has no right to influence us because, when carried further, it undermines its own authority.

Reason, thus limited, is simply the following of general rules within their natural scope. The general rule tells us that "we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding"(p. 181-82). The first and second judgment are the natural effects of our experience. But, when we try to extend the scope of the rule beyond its natural scope, our reason "subverts itself" and, thus subverted, has no authority to either condemn or condone our judgments. The limitations of the authority of general rules turns out to be the limitations of the authority of reason.

The fact that Hume partially equates following general rules with following reason has some interesting and important consequences. To follow reason is either to adhere to the a priori principles of demonstrative reasoning,or to adhere to the established principles of the imagination. Although we can know a priori that demonstrative principles lead to truth, we cannot know a priori the extent to which we are capable of properly employing such principles in our

judgments. This can only be known by our experience, and our experience proves that we make mistakes in the employment of such principles. Thus, our demonstrative judgments are subject to the control of our non-demonstrative judgments, in the sense that our belief that our demonstrative judgments are true ultimately depends on our past experience of success or failure in employing demonstrative principles in our judgments.

Hume has, in effect, stood the Cartesian view of reason on its head. Instead of making our empirical judgments subject to the regulation and control of our a priori judgments, Hume makes our a priori judgments subject to the regulation and control of our empirical or, more specifically, our causal judgments.

Causal judgments are, of course, founded on custom. But what is important to note is that this is not the basis for Hume's skepticism here. Hume's argument presupposes that rational judgment consists in following general rules--adhering to those principles that experience has shown lead to true judgments. Hume's skepticism arises from two factors. First, by consistently employing these principles of reason, we will ultimately undermine all belief, including the belief that following our reason is rationally preferable to following the "trivial suggestions of the fancy". Second, this result is only prevented by a principle of judgment that reason explicitly condemns because experience

has shown that it leads to false judgments. Thus Hume's concern is not that reason depends on custom--the extensive and constant operations of the imagination. To adhere to such principles constitutes being reasonable. This is Hume's naturalistic conception of reason. Hume's concern is that reason, correctly understood, is ultimately self-destructive and that it is only prevented from this fate by "that singular and seemingly trivial propensity of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things...(p. 268).

This result is particularly relevant in considering the relationship between Hume's skepticism and his naturalism. Beginning with Kemp Smith there has been an increasing number of commentators who challenge the traditional view of Hume's philosophy as primarily negative and skeptical. Kemp Smith viewed Hume's philosophy as consisting of two complimentary elements:

> A sceptical discipline to open [men's] eyes to the deceptiveness of the mistaken endeavours, both moral and speculative, into which his specifically human powers are ever tending to betray him, and a positive naturalistic philosophy to mark out the path upon which he can confidently travel without any such attempted violation of human nature....[10]

In this two-fold task of philosophy, "scepticism serves as an ally, but in due subordination, not as an equal".[11]

Thus, on Kemp Smith's interpretation, the positive task of presenting a naturalistic interpretation of the nature and function of reason takes precedence over the negative, skeptical task of defining the limitation of reason.

This tendency to emphasize the naturalistic element in Hume has even led at least one commentator to deny that Hume's philosophy is in any way skeptical:

> It has always seemed to me that Hume's pretense at skepticism was a literary device in the Treatise with which to tease his opponents and to prepare the reader for a more favorable reception of his own theory of the passions.... By the time Hume wrote the first Enquiry, he went out of his way to be more explicit in showing that skepticism was a literary device employed to serve other purposes.[12]

But the more common tendency of the "Hume as naturalist" school is not to deny that Hume's philosophy is in any way skeptical but to follow Kemp Smith in the claim that many of the skeptical arguments in the Treatise are aimed at discrediting what Hume took to be an incorrect account of the nature of reason. Thus Stroud claims that Hume's skeptical arguments were meant to "show that reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life".[14] In this vein one might argue that "skepticism" about causal inference is the result of an incorrect view of what constitutes the operation of reason, a view of reason that Hume himself

rejects.

I confess that I am sympathetic to this view. As I pointed out in Chapter I, one of Hume's primary aims in the Treatise was to discover the true nature of the understanding, and this required an extensive critique of the Cartesian view. I also believe that there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that, in many arguments traditionally interpreted as skeptical attacks on reason, Hume was actually engaged in a process of redefining what constitutes reason, reasoning, and being reasonable.[9] But the point I want to make does not depend on accepting this view. What I want to argue is that, even if this view is correct, it does not entail the conclusion that Hume was not--or was not primarily -- a skeptic.

This sort of conclusion seems to be the result of the following type of reasoning: If we accept a certain (false) view of the nature of reason, we are led to highly skeptical conclusions such as the conclusion that causal inference is irrational. On the other hand, if we replace this false account of reason with a correct, naturalistic account, these sorts of skeptical conclusions do not follow. Thus, by adopting the correct view of reason, skepticism is avoided. Of course, on the naturalistic interpretation, reason is much more limited in scope, but this limitation is primarily psychological. Hume's "moderate skepticism" is the recognition of the psychological limits of reason,

properly understood.

Hume's argument in "Of scepticism with regard to reason" belies this sort of conclusion. The conception of reason in this section is entirely naturalistic. Reason, in the form of general rules, is viewed as the "general and more establish'd properties of the imagination", its principles derived from experience and founded on custom. But Hume's skeptical conclusion about reason thus understood is not merely a claim about our psychological limitations. Psychological factors explain why we do not, in fact, follow our reason beyond a certain point. But Hume's claim is that, if we <u>were</u> to follow our reason beyond these psychological limitations, we would discover the limitations of the legitimate authority of reason. At a certain point reason becomes self-destructive and undermines its authority to condemn or condone our beliefs.

NOTES

[1] Cf., Kemp Smith, pp. 58-62; Fate Norton, "History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought," David Hume: Philosophical Historian, ed. D.F. Norton and R.H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); Wright, pp. 192-205; Nicholas Capaldi, David Hume (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), Chapter 3.

[2] John Passmore, Hume's Intentions (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 60.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 44.

[5] Ibid., p. 112.

[6] Robert Fogelin, Hume's Skepticism in the "Treatise of Human Nature" (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 20.

[7] Hume's reference here is to the rules of demonstrative inference, not to general rules.

[8] I use percentages here merely for convenience. I have chosen these particular percentages for the same reason. Hume's argument does not require that the original degree of conviction be as high as I indicate by "90%", nor does it require that the conviction in each successive judgment be the same as in the initial judgment.

[9] Well, not quite. Hume grants that beliefs can be modified in other ways. For example, they can "decay" over time. Modifications of this sort constitute the "unphilosophical probabilities". But the philosophically respectible ways of modifying belief depend on the acceptance of other beliefs.

[10] Kemp Smith, p. 132.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Capaldi, pp. 200-201.

[13] Barry Stroud, Hume (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 14.

[14] Whether or not one accepts this view, it must be admitted that Kemp Smith, Stroud and Capaldi offer a good deal of evidence to support their interpretations. They are joined by many recent commentators, including Fate Norton in David Hume: Common Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician and Wright in The Sceptical Realism of David Hume, both of whom argue that at least some of Hume's purportedly skeptical arguments are actually criticisms of what Hume took to be an incorrect view of human reason.

C H A P T E R I V

GENERAL RULES AND THE PASSIONS

As I pointed out in Chapter I, gaining an accurate picture of Hume's views requires understanding certain peculiarities in his method of presentation. As one commentator aptly described it, reading the Treatise is like reading a good detective story.[1] As the 'plot' unfolds, new facts are revealed, forcing the reader to reassess earlier situations and incidents in light of the new information. This feature of Hume's style is particularly evident in the relationship between Book I and Book II of the Treatise. Although his Book I examples of judgments sometimes reveal the interaction between passions and judgments, Hume's exposition of his theory of judgment gives the reader little reason to suppose that there is any major connection between the two. But in Book II, it becomes clear that Book I presents an abstract and artificial view of judgment. However useful it may be to consider judgment apart from the passions, in actual practice they are inseparable.[2] In fact, Hume goes so far as to claim that every impression and idea is attended with some degree of passion or emotion.

> I believe it may safely be establish'd for a general maxim, that no object is presented to the senses, nor image form'd in the fancy, but what is accompany'd with some emotion or movement of

spirits proportion'd to it....(p. 373)

Beginning with the work of Kemp Smith there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of the passions in Hume's philosophy. Kemp Smith directed attention to the relation between Hume's theory of the passions and his epistemology. Pall Ardal emphasized the important role of the passions in Hume's moral philosophy. Whether or not one agrees with their particular interpretations, their general point must be conceded: according to Hume, the passions are intimately related to judgment.

In this chapter I shall examine this relation and show how it allows us to regulate and control our passions according to general rules. I shall begin with a brief review of Hume's theory of the passions.

According to Hume, impressions may be divided into two categories: original impressions or impressions of sensation and secondary impressions or impressions of reflection. Original impressions he describes as those that "without any antecedent perception arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of objects to the external organs"(p. 275). The passions are impressions of reflection or secondary impressions.

Hume makes two further distinctions among the passions. First, a passion may be either calm or violent. The calm-

ness or violence of a passion is simply its degree of felt intensity. Because any individual passion may vary in intensity according to the circumstances, a determinate classification of particular passions as either calm or violent is impossible. But a rule of thumb division can be made according to how a passion is typically experienced. The senses of beauty and deformity are typically experienced as low in intensity and thus may be classed as calm passions, while love and hatred are generally experienced as high in intensity and thus may be classed as violent. Although he admits that the distinction is "vulgar and specious", Hume adopts it as a useful way of introducing "greater order" into his account (p. 276).

The second distinction is between direct and indirect passions. Direct passions "arise immediately from good or evil, from pleasure or pain"(p. 276). Hume's examples of such direct passions include desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security. Indirect passions also arise from pleasure and pain but only in combination with "other qualities". Examples of indirect passions include pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, malice and generosity.

The operation of the direct passions is straightforward. An object which produces pleasure directly arouses such passions as aversion and grief. The indirect passions are more complicated. Their production involves what Hume

calls a "double relation of impressions and ideas"(p. 286). The clearest way to explain Hume's meaning is by an example. Following Hume, I shall concentrate on the indirect passion of pride.

Suppose I am proud of some particular house. My pride has both a cause and what Hume calls an object. The cause of my pride is the house and the object of my pride is my self. When by pride is aroused "the first idea, that is presented to the mind, is that of the cause or productive principle. This excites the passion connected with it; and that passion, when excited, turns our view to another idea, which is that of self"(p. 278). The cause of the pride can be further divided into subject and quality. It is not the house per se that arouses my pride but some particular pleasing quality of the house. The same subject might produce contrary passions. One quality, for instance the beauty of the house's exterior, may arouse pride, while another quality, say its tacky furnishings, may produce humility. Besides a pleasing quality in the subject there is one further requirement for the production of pride. The subject must bear some relation to myself. I may admire a beautiful house that has no relation to me, but I cannot be proud of it.

The "double relation" consists in the relation between two ideas, the idea of the subject and the idea of the self,

and the relation between two impressions, the impres-sion of pleasure and the impression of pride. Hume explains the process as follows:

> The quality [beauty], which operates on the passion [pride], produces separately an impression [pleasure] resembling it; the subject [house], to which the quality adheres, is related to self, the object of the passion.... (p. 289)

Thus, the double relation of impressions and ideas consists in the following four relations:

> 1. The idea of the beautiful house and the idea of the self. The house belongs to me.
>
> 2. The idea of the beautiful house and the impression of pleasure. The idea of the house produces pleasure.
>
> 3. The impression of pleasure and the impression of pride. The impression of pleasure resembles the impression of pride.
>
> 4. The impression of pride and the idea of self. The impression of pride has self as its object "by an original and natural instinct"(p. 286).

More generally, whenever an idea of an object related to me produces pleasure, it will produce pride, which resembles the impression of pleasure and is naturally related to the idea of self. Humility follows the same model. When an idea of an object related to me produces displeasure or pain, it will produce humility, which resembles the

impression of pain and is naturally related to the idea of self.

All the indirect passions take some self as their object. Pride, humility, ambition, and vanity take as their object the self of the person experiencing the passion. Love, hatred, envy, pity, malice and generosity are directed toward some other self. But, in either case, the passions involved depend on a double relation of impressions and ideas.

The above account is admittedly a simplified version of Hume's theory but it will be adequate for understanding the role of general rules in Hume's theory of the passions.

Although general rules enter into Hume's account in a number of ways, their primary role is in the regulation and control of the passions. This regulatory function is evident in the following passage:

> The passions are often vary'd by very inconsiderable principles; and these do not always play with perfect regularity, especially on the first trial. But as custom and practice have brought to light all these principles, and have settled the just value of every thing; this must certainly contribute to the easy production of the passions, and guide us, by means of general establish'd maxims, in the proportions we ought to observe in preferring one object to another.(p. 294)

This passage is curious, for it supposes a point that appears to be at odds with what Hume claims elsewhere. More

specifically, it implies that there are proper or correct degrees of passions and improper or incorrect degrees of passion. We "ought" to proportion our passions properly. But this seems tantamount to saying that passions can be correct or incorrect and thus reasonable or unreasonable, and Hume denies both these claims. In the section "Of the influencing motives of the will", Hume argues that reason can never direct the will (provide a motivation to act); therefore, reason can never oppose a passion. Reason is concerned with the discovery of truth: demonstrative reason with truth concerning the relation of ideas, probable reason with the truth concerning matters of fact and existence. The "proper province" of demonstrative reason is "the world of ideas, and as the will always places us in that of realities, demonstration and volition seem, upon that account, to be totally remov'd from each other"(p. 413). Probable reason informs us of causes and effects. But knowledge of causes and effects will not move us to act unless we have some desire or aversion to them.

> 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises toward any object; And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are point'd out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such other effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not

> effect us, their connexion can never give them any influence; and 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us. (p. 414)

Having argued that reason cannot provide a motive for action, Hume goes on to claim that a passion, in and of itself, cannot be unreasonable. Reason is the discovery of truth. "Nothing can be contrary to truth and reason except what has reference to it..."(p. 415). A passion is an "original existence ... and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence ..."(p. 415). Fear, for instance, is a particular sort of impression or feeling. This feeling does not represent any qualities or relations of objects or ideas any more than a pain or a tickle. It cannot be true or false, correct or incorrect, thus it cannot be contrary to reason or unreasonable.

Note that Hume is not denying that reason has a role in directing the passions. Our passions are aroused from the "prospect of pain or pleasure". Reason discovers the qualities of objects that produce pain or pleasure and it discovers the means for attaining (or avoiding) objects. A passion can be considered unreasonable or reasonable only insofar as it is "accompany'd with some judgment or opinion"(p. 416). Given the role of reason in the production of the passions, it follows that a passion can be viewed as

unreasonable in either of two ways: when it is "founded on the supposition of the existence of objects, which really do not exist" or "when in exerting any passion in action, we chuse means insufficient for the design'd end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects"(p. 416).

In effect, Hume is saying that a passion can be considered unreasonable only when it is based on a false judgment. "Where a passion is neither founded on a false supposition, nor chuses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it"(p. 416). This claim has drawn quite a bit of (deserved) criticism and for that reason I want to examine it in some detail. But, before doing so, I want to point out a few important facts concerning the relationship between judgments and passions.

As I noted above, Hume claims that passions can be considered reasonable or unreasonable only insofar as they are based on a judgment. One should note that in actual fact, barring highly unusual circumstances, almost all the passions will be accompanied by a judgment.[3] It follows that most actual passions <u>can</u> be evaluated in terms of reasonableness. Passions do not exist in a void. They are the effects of certain objects or, more specifically, certain qualities of objects. The effect that an object has on us (the passion it produces) will depend on our view or conception of the object; in other words, the passion will

depend on our belief. It follows that insofar as a passion depends on any sort of belief, it is subject to an evaluation of reasonableness.

Once the importance of the role of judgments or beliefs in the production of the passions is recognized, the role of judgment in regulating and guiding the passions is clarified. Generally, a passion will require a judgment about the existence or probable existence of an object. Passions will also depend on the ability to distinguish various qualities of the object and the causes and effects of such qualities. If a passion is to be reasonable, the various judgments involved in arousing the passion must be reasonable. An example from Book I provides an excellent illustration of the complex interplay between judgment and passion, while, at the same time, providing a paradigm of an "unreasonable" passion.

> Consider the case of a man, who being hung out from a high tower in a cage of iron cannot forbear trembling, when he surveys the precipice below him, tho' he knows himself to be perfectly secure from falling, by his experience of the solidity of the iron, which supports him; and tho' the ideas of fall and descent, and harm and death, be deriv'd solely from custom and experience. The same custom goes beyond the instances, from which it is deriv'd , and to which it perfectly corresponds; and influences his ideas of such objects as are in some respects resembling, but fall not precisely under the same rule. The circumstances of depth and descent strike so strongly upon him, that their

> influence cannot be destroy'd by the contrary circumstances of support and solidity, which ought to give him perfect security. His imagination runs away with its object, and excites a passion proportion'd to it. That passion returns back upon the imagination and inlivens the idea; which lively idea has a new influence on the passion, and in its turn augments it force and violence; and both his fancy and affections, thus mutually supporting each other, cause the whole to have a very great influence upon him. (pp. 148-49)

The unreasonableness of the passion can be traced to the unreasonableness of the judgment, and the unreasonableness of the judgment can, in this case, be attributed to a "rashly formed" general rule. Such a rule "goes beyond the instances, from which it is deriv'd, and to which it perfectly corresponds; and influences ... ideas of such objects as are in some respects resembling, but fall not precisely under the same rule"(p. 148). The man's experience has taught him to causally associate height with "fall and descent", and fall and descent with "harm and death". But, while his present experience resembles a dangerous situation in these respects, it differs from such situations in an essential way. The properties of the iron which surrounds him make him "perfectly secure".

Under different circumstances the man might have corrected his rash judgment by a judgment based on properly formed general rules. But, in this example, such correction is prevented by the intervention of a new factor--the

arousal of a violent, direct passion. The original judgment of danger arouses fear. The violence of this passion infects the imagination, strengthening the belief that aroused the passion. This strengthened belief increases his fear. "His imagination runs away with its object, and excites a passion proportion'd to it. That passion returns back upon the imagination and inlivens the idea; which lively idea has a new influence on the passion, and in turn augments its force and violence..."(p. 148).

According to Hume, judgments made according to the rash formation of general rules can only be corrected by a "second influence" of general rules. But, as the example illustrates, such correction can be thwarted by the intervention of a passion, which serves to reinforce the initial belief. No doubt Hume's awareness of such "passionate beliefs" was in some measure responsible for his occasional pessimism about the ability of human beings to be reasonable. The difficulty of correcting beliefs reinforced by passions is obvious. To modify or eliminate the belief, the passions must be lessened. But, to lessen the passion, the belief must be modified or eliminated.

Similar examples include cases of religious fanaticism or deep-rooted prejudices, both major concerns of Hume. Such prejudices are simply beliefs reinforced by such passions as fear and hatred. These sorts of beliefs cannot be

corrected merely by pointing out contrary facts or reviewing the original judgment any more than the terror-stricken man's belief that he is in danger can be corrected by pointing out the properties of iron. The best defense against these erroneous passionate beliefs is to avoid the initial incorrect judgments, and this is best achieved by cultivating sound judgment. Sound judgment consists in proportioning one's beliefs to the evidence provided by experience or, what amounts to the same thing, following properly formed general rules.

To what extent does the above example accord with what Hume says about the relationship between reason and passions? Clearly, the man's fear, considered in and of itself, is neither reasonable nor unreasonable any more than the feeling of pain or a tickle would be reasonable or unreasonable. It is only in relation to his beliefs about his situation that his fear can be called unreasonable. More specifically, we can judge his fear unreasonable only by assessing how his beliefs were formed.

I emphasize this point because it plainly conflicts with a claim of Hume's mentioned earlier. Recall that Hume claims that there are two ways in which a passion can be unreasonable; first, when it is "founded on the supposition of the existence of objects, which really do not exist", and second, "when in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the design'd end and deceive our-

selves in our judgment of causes and effects"(p. 416). In other words, a passion is unreasonable when it is based on a false belief or judgment. But, in the example, it is not that the man's belief is false that makes it unreasonable; it is that the belief is unwarranted by the evidence. The man believes that he is in a dangerous situation but has no good reason to believe this.

If the example is modified, it becomes clear that the unreasonableness of his belief does not stem from the fact that it is false. Suppose that the man in the cage has had enough experience to be aware of the danger of falling from heights, but no experience of the properties of iron or any similar material. Such a man would falsely believe himself to be in great danger, but, unlike the man in Hume's example, this man's belief and subsequent fear would not be unreasonable. Furthermore, just as a false belief or judgment may be reasonable, so too a true belief may be unreasonable. The man might correctly believe that he is perfectly safe, not because he correctly assesses the properties of iron (which we are supposing he has no knowledge of) but because a palm reader told him he would live a long and healthy life.

Hume is certainly wrong in claiming that to be contrary to reason or unreasonable is equivalent to being false and, conversely, to be in accordance with reason or reasonable is equivalent to being true. What is curious here is not that

Hume is mistaken, but that such a claim is completely at odds with the view of sound judgment developed in Book I. In fact, the view that a reasonable judgment is equivalent to a true judgment is thoroughly Cartesian. On a Cartesian view of the understanding, reason is infallible. The source of error lies in the will's assenting to judgments that are not recognized by the intellect as certain. When correctly employed--guided by reason--our faculty of judgment will never lead us to error.[4] If Hume rejected the Cartesian view of the understanding (and, for that matter, the will), why should he here present a view of reasonableness that is clearly Cartesian? There is, I believe, a very plausible explanation for this and other anomalies in Hume's remarks about reason.[5] These anomalies stem from Hume's development of a theory of the understanding that entails a view of reason that is substantially different from traditional views. The problem Hume faced was how to develop his views about the nature of sound judgment within a tradition where the nature of reason was defined according to a view of the understanding that he rejected.

The conflict between the claim made in Book I, that sound judgment consists in proportioning one's beliefs to the evidence, and the claim made in Book II, that reasonable judgments (thus, presumably, sound judgments) are true judgments is simply one example of Hume's difficulty. There are

others. For instance, a similar conflict occurs in Book I and, interestingly enough, the conflicting statements appear on the very same page. In a footnote clarifying his view of the "acts of the understanding", Hume asserts (against the popular view) that "we may exert our reason without employing more than two ideas, and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them"(p. 97n, emphasis mine). Hume's example is that "we infer a cause immediately from its effect" and he claims that "this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others...."(p. 97n, emphasis mine). In the text of the same page Hume tells us that "reason can never satisfy us that the existence of any one object does ever imply that of another; so that when we pass from the impression of one to the idea or belief of another, we are not determin'd by reason, but by custom or a principle of association"(p. 97). Thus, on one and the same page Hume tells us both that, in causal inference, we "exert our reason" and that, in causal inference, we are "not determin'd by reason".

I think these conflicts can be explained in the following manner: As Hume's footnote makes clear, there was a then common, traditional view of the nature and operation of the understanding. Hume rejected this view in the sense that he offered a different explanation of the operations involved in the "acts of the understanding". This poses an immediate problem of how he could intelligibly state his

position. There are two possibilities. He could retain what he might call the "common signification of words", in other words, the common meaning of "reason" that was tied to a traditional view of the nature of the understanding. If he did so, then he must deny that certain operations of thought, commonly supposed to be operations of the understanding or reason, are really the workings of reason at all. He must, for instance, deny that causal inference is "determin'd by reason" or, as he puts it in the Enquiry, that causal inference is "founded on reasoning, or on any process of the understanding".[6]

On the other hand, he might maintain that the operations of thought commonly supposed to be acts of the understanding and determined by reason really are so. But, given his account of the nature of the understanding, to do this requires that he assign a different signification to words, that is, it requires redefining "reason" and "understanding". In this way Hume could quite legitimately state that causal inference is a "true species of reasoning".[7] In fact, for the most part, Hume follows the first course; he maintains the common meaning of "reason" and denies that certain acts of thought are really the products of reason.[8] One might note that this way of presenting his position has considerably more shock value and is, thereby, more conducive to his skeptical position. But I do not see

any reason to suppose that Hume ever explicitly recognized his options and consciously chose to retain the common meaning. In fact, the existence of the conflicting statements in his seems to indicate just the opposite.

My discussion of the conflicts in Hume's comments on reason is meant to emphasize an important point. Hume claims that a passion is reasonable or unreasonable to the extent that the judgment(s) involved in arousing the passion are reasonable or unreasonable. But, while he claims that a judgment is reasonable when it is true and unreasonable when it is false, this is true only when reason is understood along Cartesian lines. In fact, according to Hume's own account of judgment, a judgment is sound--what we would call "reasonable"--when it is warranted by the evidence and unreasonable when it is unwarranted by the evidence. In the example cited, Hume evaluates the passion according to his own theory, that is, according to whether the judgment involved is warranted or unwarranted.

I have argued that general rules serve to regulate and control the passions by regulating and controlling the judgments necessary for their production. So far I have concentrated on one type of judgment--judgment about the existence of objects (or qualities of objects).[9] But there is often another type of judgment involved in the arousal of a passion. In addition to judgments concerning the existence of objects, the production of a passion often

requires a value judgment. A proper treatment of this aspect of Hume's view will require a review of his theory of value, which includes aesthetic, moral and political judgments. Although I am still concerned with the question of how general rules regulate the passions, I think that the discussion of the bearing Hume's value theory has on the answer to this question warrants a separate chapter.

NOTES

[1] Pall Ardal, "Convention and Value," in David Hume, Bicentenary Papers, ed. G.P. Morice (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 51-67.

[2] Hume acknowledges as much in the following comment from Book III:

> "Human nature being compos'd of two principle parts, which are requisite in all its actions, the affection and understanding; 'tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society: And it may be allow'd us to consider separately the effects, that result from separate operations of these two component parts of the mind. The same liberty many be permitted to moral, which is allow'd to natural philosophers; and 'tis very usual with the latter to consider any motion as compounded and consisting of two parts separate from each other, tho' at the same time they acknowledge it to be in itself uncompounded and inseparable"(p. 493).

[3] I make two qualifications here; both need explanation. The first qualification, "barring highly unusual circumstances", stems from the following considerations. According to Hume, passions are impressions. Although their causes are generally different from the causes of sensations (primary impressions), they are like sensations in that their "essence" consists in their particular phenomenal feels. The fact that particular passions are produced by certain causes is merely a contingent fact based on the physical constitution of human beings. There is no a priori reason why pain should not arouse desire and pleasure arouse aversion. (There are, of course, obvious evolutionary "reasons" why this should not be so).

Granting this, it is easy to imagine a situation in which a passion could be aroused without a judgment. Direct stimulation of the brain could cause a passion. An electrode in the right spot can arouse rage, fear, desire, etc. Hume would admit that an unusual movement of animal spirits

could arouse a passion.

The second qualification, "almost all the passions", is needed because, at one point in Book II, Hume rather casually introduces a number of "passions" that differ from previously described passions in a number of respects. These unusual passions do not arise from pain or pleasure, but "from a natural impulse or instinct". They include "the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust and a few other bodily appetites"(p. 439). While it is plausible to suppose that the desire for the happiness of our friends and harm to our enemies requires a judgment, it is not as plausible to suppose that lust requires a judgment, although it may, in most instances, involve one. Hunger, on the other hand, certainly does not require a judgment.

[4] "Whatever I understand, because it is from God that I have the power of understanding, I doubtless understand rightly; it is impossible for anything to take place in the intellect that could cause me to be deceived. From what source, therefore, do my errors arise? Solely from the fact that, because the will extends further than the intellect, I do not contain my will within the same boundaries; rather, I even extend it to things I do not understand. Because my will is indifferent to these latter things, it easily turns away from the true and the good; in this way I am deceived and commit sin" (Rene Descartes, Meditations, trans. Donald A. Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979, pp. 37-38.

[5] A number of commentators have remarked on the ambiguity in Hume's use of the term 'reason'. Fate Norton, for example, lists seven "principle" senses in which Hume uses the term. This sort of ambiguity is not at all surprising. If one were to survey current usage fo the term, one would most likely discover at least as many senses. The sense of the term 'reason' was, and still is, vague and indeterminate. This sort of ambiguity, although confusing at times, is not particularly significant. But it is significant that Hume appears to have two different and conflicting views of the nature of reason.

[6] Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 21.

[7] A simple analogy might serve to clarify the point.

Suppose a society where certain people are considered lunatics and the meaning of 'lunatic' is 'a person driven mad by the effects of the moon'. Further suppose some enterprising scientist conducts experiments and concludes that the moon has no effect on people's behavior. There are two ways the scientist might explain his findings. He might retain the common meaning of 'lunatic' and declare that there are no lunatics. On the other hand, he might continue to call certain people lunatics, but in doing so, use the term in a new sense. He might, for example, use 'lunatic' simply to refer to people who exhibit bizarre behavior, without regard to the cause of the behavior. Or, he might substitute some other cause, for example, 'people driven mad from the effects of a chemical imbalance in the brain'. It would be equally legitimate for the scientist to retain the common usage and deny there are lunatics or change the common usage and agree there are lunatics. But, if he were to vacillate between these two courses, he would, no doubt, create a certain amount of confusion.

[8] Aside from Hume's claims that causal inference is not a form of reasoning or based on reason, I think there is other evidence that he retained the standard sense of 'reason'. Judgments or beliefs that are "proportioned to the evidence" are what we would call rational or reasonable judgments. We call people who generally form their judgments in this manner rational or reasonable people. Hume invariably calls judgments of this sort "sound judgment" or "solid sense" and people who make such judgments "wise" or "judicious reasoners". His general policy of restricting the descriptive terms 'rational' or 'reasonable' to what is demonstratively certain accords with the view that, for the most part, Hume uses 'reason' in its traditional sense.

[9] I am following Hume in using "object" in a very loose sense that covers individual objects, events, and states of affairs.

C H A P T E R V

GENERAL RULES AND OBJECTIVE VALUE

In the last chapter I discussed Hume's theory of the passions and showed how the passions can be regulated by conforming our judgments to general rules. I also argued that the relationship between the passions and judgment allows us to evaluate the reasonableness of a passion. In this chapter I want to extend the discussion to include value judgments. The connection between the passions and value judgments serves as the foundation to Hume's aesthetic, moral, and political theories. Thus, an examination of the role of general rules in value judgments will reveal their significance to these areas of Hume's philosophy.

The "Just Value" of Objects

Hume explicitly links general rules to value judgments in the following passage from the Treatise:

> The influence of general rules and maxims on the passions very much contributes to facilitate the effects of all the principles which we shall explain in the progress of this treatise. For 'tis evident, that if a person full-grown, and of the same nature with ourselves, were on a sudden transported into our world, he wou'd be very much embarass'd with every object, and wou'd not readily find what degree of love or hatred,

> pride or humility, or any other passion he ought to attribute to it. The passions are often vary'd by very inconsiderable principles; and these do not always play with perfect regularity, especially on the first trial. But as custom and practice have brought to light all these principles, and have settled the just value of every thing; this must certainly contribute to the easy production of the passions, and guide us, by means of general establish'd maxims, in the proportion we ought to observe in preferring one object to another.(p. 293-94)

To discover the role of general rules in guiding the value judgments underlying the passions, it will be necessary to clarify what Hume means by "just value".

Fundamentally, the value of an object is its power to produce pleasure or pain. Some care must be taken in interpreting this. By "power" Hume does not mean to refer to any hidden force or principle. In discussing the powers or abilities that we ascribe to persons, Hume explains that "power has always a reference to its exercise, either actual or probable, and that we consider a person endow'd with any ability when we find from past experience, that 'tis probable, or at least possible he may exert it"(p. 313). Hume concludes that "power consists in the possibility of probability of any action, as discover'd by experience and the practice of the world"(p. 313).[1] Analogously, the power of an object to produce pleasure or pain is simply the probability or possibility that the object will produce

pleasure or pain "as discovered by experience".[2]

While Hume's view concerning the value of an object is fairly simple, his view on what determines the just value of an object is substantially more complex. It may seem that there is no reason for any complexity in this regard. Granting that the value of an object is its ability to cause pleasure or pain, we can distinguish between actual and apparent value. We can be mistaken about whether an object really does produce pleasure and thus act according to what is merely its apparent value and not its "just" value. Hume's reference to "just value" can be taken simply as a recognition of this distinction.

Hume certainly does acknowledge this distinction and recognizes the importance of exercising sound judgment in this respect. But his notion of what is involved in determining just value requires another, equally important, distinction. Determining the just value of an object requires distinguishing between subjective and objective value. This claim may appear quite out of place in Hume's account, which is often taken to be a form of subjectivism. Whether an object is pleasant or painful would appear to be a matter for the individual to decide, for pain and pleasure are not qualities of objects but the effects of qualities of objects. Inasmuch as there are considerable differences between individuals with respect to what is considered painful or pleasant, there seems no room for objective criteria.

Hume quite explicitly denies this conclusion, maintaining that a person can be mistaken in judging an object valuable even when that object does, in fact, give him pleasure. Understanding this claim will require a more detailed picture of Hume's theory of value. To obtain this picture I want to depart from the methodology I have been observing, which has been to rely exclusively on the text of the Treatise, and examine Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste". Inasmuch as my expressed aim is to explain the role of general rules in the Treatise, the introduction of views expressed in another, much later work, requires some justification. I shall attempt to provide this justification by answering the two major objections to this change in procedure.

The first objection is that, given the nearly twenty years between the publication of the Treatise and the publication of the "Standard of Taste", it is not implausible to suppose that Hume either developed new views or changed his earlier views. While this is certainly not implausible, I believe that it is false. The views expressed in the "Standard of Taste" can all be found, either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed, in the Treatise. The problem with working entirely from the Treatise is that Hume's value theory is not presented in a neat and orderly manner. Instead it must be pieced together from the various

comments scattered throughout Books II and III. In presenting the theory found in the "Standard of Taste", I shall provide ample evidence of the same views expressed in the Treatise.

The second objection is that the "Standard of Taste" is an essay on aesthetic judgment and that one cannot simply assume that the principles involved can be generalized to cover value judgments in general. It is true that this cannot simply be assumed but, fortunately, Hume eliminates the need for any such supposition by making clear that "fixing the epithets of praise or blame" depends on the same fundamental principles whether the praise and blame be aesthetic or moral. This is particularly evident in Hume's practice of using examples from aesthetics to illustrate points in his moral theory and vice versa.

In "Of the Standard of Taste" Hume argues against what he believes to be a common misconception about the nature of aesthetic judgments. Hume characterizes this incorrect view as follows:

> All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matters of fact.... A thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object.... Beauty is no quality in

> things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.[3]

While the view that beauty is in the eye of the beholder has gained such currency that it passes for a matter of simple common sense, Hume argues that, in fact, it conflicts with another common sense view. Someone who claims the works of Ogilby to be just as good as the works of Milton "would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained ... a pool as extensive as the ocean".[4] Someone might well prefer Ogilby to Milton, but this would be taken not as a mere difference in taste but as a lack of taste.

To acknowledge that a person can be incorrect in an aesthetic judgment is to admit that there is some standard of taste other than individual sentiment. This standard is discoverable by "general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and all ages".[5]

What Hume has in mind here is this: Although, strictly speaking, beauty is not a quality of objects, there are properties of objects which, as a matter of contingent fact, arouse the sense of beauty in human beings. He likens this to the primary/secondary quality distinction. Sweetness is not thought to be a quality in any object, but the effect that certain qualities in an object produce in us. The

existence of the independent objective quality in the object and its causal relationship to our sensation allows us to make the objective judgment that a certain object is sweet. This objective judgment can be distinguished from the subjective judgment that an object tastes sweet or seems sweet to a particular individual.

The same is true of the sentiment of beauty.[6] Given the structure of human organisms, certain qualities of objects will produce certain effects on human beings.

> Though it be certain that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external, it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce these particular feelings.[7]

The relationship between a given quality and he sentiment (or passion) it produces is causal and, thus, contingent. But as long as the psychophysiological makeup (what Hume calls the "nature") of human beings remains the same there will be a basis for objective value judgments.

> Amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric are calculated to please, and other to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from

> some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ.[8]

Hume does not deny that there can be considerable variations among value judgments, not only between individuals, but even between cultures and ages. There are a number of factors that might produce such variation. One common cause of a difference in value judgment is the failure to distinguish subjective from objective judgments. This sort of failure can be identified by attending to the language of the evaluator. The beetle phobic who claims that Kafka's Metamorphosis is an inferior work is using the language of objective valuation to express subjective distaste. The mother who calls her daughter's novels brilliant to express her personal enjoyment likewise misuses language. There are, Hume says, "certain terms in every language which import blame, and others praise; and all men who use the same tongue must agree in their application of them".[9] To call a work inferior is not equivalent to expressing dislike, and equating the two reveals a basic lack of understanding of the nature of evaluative language.

There are other factors that can prevent the discovery of the just value of objects. Such factors include the lack of "serenity of mind", a "due attention to the object", and "all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy".[10] Hume discusses five requirements for making correct value judgments: (1) delicacy of taste,

(2) practice, (3) comparison, (4) elimination of prejudice, and (5) good sense.

By delicacy of taste Hume means a keen power of discernment. The passions and sentiments depend on our judgments concerning the qualities of objects. Many differences in passions arise from differences in ability to discern and distinguish such qualities. Developing one's power of discernment requires practice.

> When objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination, the sentiment which attends them is obscure and confused; and the mind is, in great measure, incapable of pronouncing concerning their merits or defects.... But allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice; he not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame.[11]

The third requirement for correct value judgment is comparison. "A man who has no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any objects.... By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise and blame and learn how to assign the due degree of each."[12] It is only by comparison that we can differentiate between various degrees of value. A mass-produced plastic figurine may have some qualities "fitted to please" and, thus, have some

measure of beauty. But, when compared to a Michelangelo, its pleasing qualities are recognized as few and crude and we adjust our judgment accordingly.

Freedom from prejudice is a matter of framing a proper evaluative viewpoint. This involves two aspects: all relevant factors must be considered, and all irrelevant factors must be ruled out. A Humean "impartial observer" is not necessarily an observer who ignores his own sentiments, but an observer who forms his judgments based on his own sentiment only after prejudice has been eliminated.

> We may observe, that every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and cannot be fully relished by persons whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance. An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, passions, and prejudices; otherwise he hopes in vain to govern their resolutions, and influence their affections.... A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, in order to form a true judgment of the oration.[13]

The final requirement, "good sense" or "sound judgment", is the most general of the five requirements. Hume is clearly referring to what we would call "intelligence". It includes "clearness of conception", "exactness of distinction", and "vivacity of apprehension".[14] Apart from

checking prejudice, sound judgment is required for analyzing a work of art. "Mutual relations and correspondence of parts" must be understood and compared in order to judge the "consistency and uniformity of the whole". When a work is designed to achieve some end or purpose, sound judgment is required to judge "how far means employed are adapted to their respective purposes".[15]

How do general rules enter into the determinations of the just value of objects? The first and most obvious way is in discerning those qualities "fitted to please". As Hume points out, it is only by experience, or custom and practice, that we come to discover what qualities please and displease, and thus, the "proportions we ought to observe in preferring one object to another"(p. 294). Experience teaches us the value of money--its ability to obtain objects which produce pleasure. According to this experience we develop general rules by which "we form a notion of the different ranks of men, suitable to the power of riches they are possest of...", and regulate our passions accordingly.(p. 293) We respect (or, more likely, envy) those with wealth, take pride in our own wealth, or are humbled by our own poverty, all in accordance with general rules involving the power of money to produce pleasure.

The general rules originate from our experience of the value of money. When, through some intervening cause, the money "fails of its usual effect", the attending passions

should also cease. But, because general rules often continue to influence us beyond the original circumstances that gave rise to them, our passions may continue to follow the general rule even when the circumstances no longer warrant the passion. We rank men according to their riches, but circumstances can counter the usual effects of such riches. Continuing to follow the general rule, we do not change our view "upon account of any peculiarities of health and temper of the persons, which may deprive them of all enjoyment in their possessions"(p. 293). Hume points out that "this may be accounted for from the same principles, that explain'd the influence of general rules on the understanding. Custom readily carries us beyond the just bounds in our passions as well as in our reasonings"(p. 293).

We can, of course, correct such judgments and, thereby, "correct" the corresponding passions by another, higher order application of general rules. Surveying past judgments of this sort, we will recognize that failure to discriminate "efficacious" from "nonefficacious" causes, or failure to take into account contrary causes, leads to mistaken judgments. When the judgment is corrected, so is the attending passion. A rich man who is unable to reap the rewards of his riches is to be pitied, not envied.

Another role of general rules is in developing the point of view necessary for an objective value judgment.

Passions are aroused and influenced by a variety of factors including the evaluator's particular relations to objects, his prejudices, and his psychological or physiological idiosyncrasies. Our passions tend to vary according to an object's relative proximity in space and time. The passions depend upon judgments and judgments depend on the imagination, which is naturally influenced aaccording to he proximity of an object.

> Here then we are to consider two kinds of objects, the contiguous and remote; of which the former, by means of their relation to ourselves, approach an impression in force and vivacity, the latter by reason of the interruption in our manner of conceiving them, appear in a weaker and more imperfect light. This is their effect on the imagination. If my reasoning be just, they must have a proportionate effect on the will and passions. Contiguous objects must have an influence much superior to the distant and remote.(p. 428)

Because the passions depend on judgment and judgment depends on the imagination, the passions will be subject to the influence of the "unphilosophical probabilities". Such passions will be inappropriate or unreasonable because they are aroused by a view of objects based on faulty judgments.

> Besides, that we ourselves often change our situation in this particular, we every day meet with persons, who are in a different situation from ourselves, and who cou'd never converse with us on any reasonable terms, were we to remain constantly in that situation and point

> of view, which is peculiar to us. The intercourse o sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners.(p. 603)

These "general and inalterable standards" are formed according to our experience of those qualities that have been "universally found to please in all countries and in all ages".[16]

The Moral Sentiments

Given the role of general rules in developing an objective evaluative viewpoint, one aspect of their importance to Hume's moral theory should be clear. According to Hume, an objective viewpoint is a necessary condition for the arousal of a truly moral sentiment. Insofar as general rules help us distinguish objective from nonobjective viewpoints, they will also help us to distinguish moral from nonmoral sentiments. But, while this is certainly a significant function of general rules, it is not their most crucial function. General rules can help us regulate our moral sentiments. But their major significance is in regulating our moral judgments.

It is impossible to appreciate the extent of the influence of general rules in Hume's moral theory without making a clear distinction between moral sentiments and

moral judgments. In fact, I think it is impossible to fully understand Hume's moral theory without being clear on this distinction. I will support both these claims and, at the same time, attempt to explalin the relationship between judgment and sentiment by examining the shortcomings of an account that fails to make an adequate distinction between the two. The account I have in mind is found in Thomas Hearn's article "General Rules and Moral Sentiments in Hume's Treatise".

Hearn points out that, according to Hume, "our sentiments are subject to influences which, if uncorrected, would render morality and moral discourse impossible".[17] He lists what he calls four "general rules" for correcting moral sentiments.

> (1) Our sentiments must reflect a point of view which abstracts from accidental relations in space and time between the observer and the object of evaluation. (2) The moral sentiments must be founded upon a general and impartial conception of their object. (3) They must reflect an entirely adequate conception of the object. (4) They must have the motives and character of agents as their ultimate object.[18]

Hearn does not discuss the relationship between judgment and sentiment; thus he has no account of just how this correction of the sentiments is achieved. I have already explained how sentiments are corrected, and it should be

clear from my description that what Hearn calls "general rules" are not really rules at all, but, rather, necessary conditions for objective moral judgments. It would be more accurate to say that we satisfy these conditions by forming our judgments according to general rules.

The first and second conditions will be met when we eliminate subjective elements from our judgments. This is achieved by eliminating prejudice and disregarding personal idiosyncrasies. The third condition will be met when we discern the qualities of objects that are "fitted" to please or displease, which involves distinguishing real from apparent qualities. Hearn's fourth condition is a distinguishing feature of moral evaluation. Moral value is distinguishable from non-moral value by its object. "The pain or pleasure, which arises from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the mind, constitutes it vice or virtue"(p. 614).

having introduced the "rules" for correcting moral sentiments, Hearn attempts to specify the connection between reason, the calm passions, and general rules. The connection, he believes, can be found in the following passages from the Treatise:

> But however the general principles of our blame or praise may be corrected by those other principles, 'tis certain they are not altogether efficacious, nor do our passions often correspond entirely to the present theory. "Tis seldom

> men heartily love what lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit; as 'tis no less rare to meet with persons, who can pardon another any opposition to their interest, however justifiable that opposition may be by the general rules of morality. Here we are contented with saying, that reason requires such an impartial conduct, but that 'tis seldom we can bring ourselves to it, and that our passions do not readily follow the determinations of our judgment. This language will be easily understood, if we consider what we formerly said concerning that reason, which is able to oppose our passion; and which we have found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflection.(p. 583)

Here Hume describes how the natural tendencies of our passions are corrected by other principles--general rules. Although these rules do not always correct our passions, Hearn notes that "they are said to be the determinations of our judgment and reason".[19] He concludes:

> The sense of reason involved here is then related to the calm passions. What I principally want to note is that Hume makes it abundantly plain here that a calm passion is a corrected passion, one that has been tested by these general rules.[20]

In explaining our tendency to confuse the calm passions with the "determinations of reason", Hume stresses the similarity in the way they "feel". Both reason and calm passions produce little or no sensible emotion. "When any

... passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are suppos'd to proceed from the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falsehood"(p. 417). Hearn argues that the calm passions are corrected passions; they are "precisely ... those states we achieve by following reflective procedures".[21] He concludes that "the relationship between reason and the calm passions is closer than Hume sometimes seems to suggest".[22]

I agree with Hearn in his emphasis on the importance of general rules in determining the reasonableness of the passions. But I think his attempt to link general rules to "reasonable" passions by equating calm passions with corrected passions is a mistake. It is a mistake in two senses. First, it is a mistake in interpretation; it misidentifies the actual place of general rules in correcting the passions. Second, it is a mistake in method. Appealing to Hume's notion of the calm passions sheds little light on the relationship between the passions and general rules. As I will show below, it actually tends to obscure the relationship.

A number of problems arise from Hearn's failure to make any clear distinction between passions and judgments.[23] For instance, consider the consequences of two of his claims: (1) A calm passion is a passion corrected by general rules, and (2) Only a passion can correct a passion.

Together these imply (3) general rules are also passions. Surely hearn does not want to make such a claim. To say that the "rule" that "moral sentiments must be founded upon a general and impartial conception of their object" is a passion makes no sense whatsoever.

Furthermore, it is clear how a passion can oppose a passion. I know what it means to say that anger can overcome fear, or that disgust can oppose curiosity. But it is not at all clear how a passion can correct a passion. Talk of correction only makes sense by making some reference to judgment. Hume is quite clear on this point.

Finally, Hearn's interpretation entails that a passion can only be corrected by employing a corrected passion. This seems to involve a troublesome regress. I am not sure of this because, as I noted above, it is unclear what it means to say that a passion can correct a passion. But if it is viewed as analogous to judgment (and, I confess, I do not know how else to view it), then it is analogous to saying that we can correct a judgment only by employing a corrected judgment. It is difficult to see how we could ever get any process of correction going under such circumstances.

These sort of difficulties would have been avoided by a more detailed examination of the relation between moral sentiments and moral judgments. What Hume is claiming in

the passage cited is that our sentiments do not always agree with our moral judgments. Numerous commentators have noted that, according to Hume, a moral judgment must be made from a certain "general" or objective point of view. This is certainly true, but it is important to be clear on just what Hume means by judging from such a viewpoint. I think a more accurate way of describing Hume's view is to say that, to judge morally is to judge as if one occupied a moral (objective) viewpoint. The point is that we can judge as if we were free from subjective influences without, in fact, being free from subjective influences. This is exactly what happens when we judge someone we loath virtuous. Our personal sentiment may prevent us from actually viewing the person objectively, yet we recognize that a moral judgment requires an objective viewpoint and we make the sort of judgment that we know would result from such a viewpoint.

A moral sentiment is aroused when we actually achieve a moral viewpoint. When our view is completely free of subjective influences, the sentiment we feel will be a truly moral sentiment. Thus moral sentiments arise only under ideal conditions and Hume's frequent reminders that people rarely manage to match their sentiments to their judgments indicates his recognition of this fact.

If this interpretation is correct, then particular moral judgments are not always based on moral sentiments. Having a genuinely objective view of a person's character is

not a necessary condition for making a moral judgment. All that is necessary for moral judgment is that we recognize what an objective view involves and that we form our judgment as if this were the view we actually have. This is achieved by forming our judgments according to general rules.

Hume's comments leading up to the quoted passages strongly support this interpretation. He first notes that, if we were to judge characters "only as they appear from our peculiar point of view", it would be impossible for us "to converse together on any reasonable terms"(p. 581). We avoid this by fixing on "some steady and general point of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation"(p. 581-82). Hume compares this to our manner of judging beauty. Our sentiment may vary according to the distance of the object viewed. But when we judge a distant object beautiful, we judge according to the effect we know it would have if it were near. We judge it beautiful "because we know what effect it will have in such a position, and by that reflection we correct its momentary appearance"(p. 582).

Clearly Hume does not want to suggest that making an aesthetic judgment requires actually viewing objects from close by. We need only judge them as if we viewed them from close by. The same is true of a moral viewpoint. Our

actual view of a person may not be free of subjective factors, but we judge as if it were free of them.

> In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable.(p. 582)

General rules can actually change our passions by correcting our judgments about the objects that arouse our passions. But, more importantly, general rules allow the possibility of making genuine moral judgments when we do not or cannot correct our passions. Even when I cannot help viewing someone as my enemy and feeling dislike, I know what my sentiment would be towards someone with the same character who is not my enemy, and this enables me to judge an enemy as if my view were objective.

Keeping this distinction between passions and judgments in mind, I shall now return to examine Hearn's view of the calm passions. While Hearn claims that the calm passions are corrected passions--passions "founded on reflection"--he does not want to claim that this is the only characterizing feature of calm passions. He merely holds that "<u>at least</u>

one sense in which passions are calm is when they are corrected by rules".[24] Hearn can thus agree with Ardal that a calm passion is one which "on most occasions involves low emotional intensity",[25] yet argue that this low intensity is a natural result of correcting a passion. This interpretation also lends credence to Hearn's view that "calm passions precisely are those states we achieve by following reflective procedures" and are, thereby, "reasonable in the ordinary way of talking".[26]

This is a very tidy picture, but it is far too simplistic. It entirely overlooks the fact that, among the calm passions often mistaken for reason, Hume lists such passions as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children'(p. 417). Such calm passions certainly are not corrected passions. Thus, not all calm passions are corrected passions. Furthermore, while it may be true that a passion that has been corrected will be low in intensity and thus experienced as calm, this is equally true of violent passions. I might correct my anger by correcting my judgment. As the result of such correction, I might reduce my anger to the point of calmness. But a corrected violent passion is still a violent passion (a passion that is generally high in intensity) even when the correction results in experiencing it as calm. So, not all corrected passions are calm passions.

If not all calm passions are corrected passions, and

not all corrected passions are calm passions, is there anything left to Hearn's claim that a calm passion is a corrected passion? Given the various other claims that Hearn makes, the only recourse that I can think of would be for him to argue along the following lines: Admittedly, any passion may be corrected by review and reflection. But review and reflection are necessary conditions for moral sentiments, and this explains why the moral sentiments are calm passions. A moral sentiment is aroused only upon a "distant view". Such a view requires the correction of our natural sentiments by reflection. Moral sentiments are just "those states we achieve by following reflective procedures".[27] This is not true of the violent passions. Reflection may be used to correct or modify a violent passion, but reflection is not a necessary condition for its arousal.

If this is the position Hearn has in mind, then his talk of calm passions obscures the point, which is merely that <u>moral sentiments</u> are corrected passions. Calmness is merely an incidental by-product of correction. But even this more limited claim is incorrect. Its mistake lies in the assumption that the objective viewpoint necessary for the arousal of moral sentiments can be achieved only by reflection and correction. According to Hume, an objective viewpoint is a necessary condition for the arousal of moral sentiments, but there is nothing in Hume's theory that says

such a viewpoint can be achieved only by a process of correction.

Hume held that all (or, at least, most) people know from experience the sentiments aroused in them when observing "qualities of mind" objectively. I know the approval I have felt when observing benevolence that neither hinders nor serves my own interests. My viewpoint in such circumstances was naturally objective; it required no particular reflection or correction. Yet my approval was moral approval all the same. Hume believed that, given the similarity of human beings, anyone in relevantly similar circumstances will experience the same sentiment upon observing similar qualities of mind. Our experience of this causal relationship allows us to form general rules. These general rules guide our judgments, allowing us to adjust our judgments to varying circumstances.

When, for instance, I have some personal quarrel with a benevolent person, my sentiment is likely to differ from those observers who have no such quarrel. Recognizing that my quarrel acts as a contrary cause, I am able to adjust my judgment by following general rules. My experience of a naturally objective viewpoint serves as the basis for forming general rules that guide my judgments when I am influenced by nonobjective factors.

Hearn and I agree that general rules are an essential element in Hume's moral theory. But we disagree on their

function. Hearn claims that moral sentiments are calm passions and that calm passions are passions corrected by general rules. Thus, a moral sentiment is simply a passion corrected by general rules. Such passions can be said to be reasonable because they are the result of reflective procedures. I argue that following general rules allows us to make the sort of objective value judgments necessary or genuinely moral judgments. The importance of general rules is not that they correct passions, thereby producing moral sentiments, but that they allow us to make moral judgments even in the absence of moral sentiments.

The Rules of Justice

An account of general rules in the Treatise would not be complete without some mention of the rules of justice. A full treatment of this subject would require a thorough analysis of Hume's theory of justice, a large topic in itself. I shall confine myself to the modest task of outlining those aspects of Hume's theory which are most essential for understanding the operations of general rules. I shall then examine certain parallels between the role of general rules in Hume's theory of justice and their role in his theory of judgment.

A virtue, according to Hume, is any quality of mind that produces a certain sort of pleasure, vice a quality of

mind that produces a certain sort of pain. The qualities that produce moral pleasure are those that are agreeable or useful to the person possessing the qualities or to others. Hume makes a distinction between two types of virtue: natural and artificial. A virtue is natural when (1) people are naturally inclined to be motivated by it (naturally possess it) and (2) people are naturally inclined to approve of it. The paradigm natural virtue is benevolence. People have a natural tendency towards benevolence, albeit in varying degrees. Hume denies that we have any such passion as "the love of mankind, merely as such"(p. 481), but this is not incompatible with the claim that we are naturally endowed with a more limited benevolence, which is strongest towards our friends and acquaintances and more limited towards "strangers and indifferent persons"(p. 488). Benevolence also elicits our natural approval.

Artificial virtues depend on the "invention or contrivance" of man. People do not naturally posses such virtues (they have no natural or original motivation to them), nor are people naturally inclined to approve of them. The artificial virtues <u>become</u> virtues only within some order of convention, which provides their motivation. Justice is a paradigm artificial virtue. There is no original motivation to the sorts of behavior we call 'just', nor is there any natural tendency to approve of such behavior. To illustrate his point, Hume considers an example of just behavior:

returning borrowed money.

What motivation might someone have to return borrowed money? The most obvious answer would be "a sense of duty and obligation"(p. 479). But, Hume claims, the regard for the virtue of an action could never be the original motivation for that action:

> We can never have a regard to the virtue of an action, unless the action be antecedently virtuous. No action can be virtuous, but so far as it proceeds from a virtuous motive. A virtuous motive must precede the regard to the virtue; and 'tis impossible, that the virtuous motive and the regard to the virtue can be the same.(p. 480)

It is a "sophistry" to say that what makes an action virtuous is a virtuous motive and what makes a motive virtuous is regard for the virtue of the action. This is "reasoning in a circle".[28]

If a sense of duty cannot provide an original motivation to return the money, what could provide such a motivation? Hume considers three alternatives: self-interest, public interest, and the interest of the lender. Obviously self-interest could not be the motivation, for it would not generally be in our interest to return the money. Public interest could not supply the motivation either. Hume cites three specific and one general objection to this possibility. First, particular acts of justice do not necessarily

promote public interest. Second, public interest would not provide a motivation to secret acts of honesty, yet such secret acts are nonetheless virtuous. Third, in actual fact, people rarely consider public interest when they choose just or honest actions. Such a motivation is "too remote and too sublime to affect the generality of mankind"(p. 481). Hume's final and more general objection is that "there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, or services, or of relation to ourself"(p. 481).

The only possibility left is the interest of the lender or benevolence. Hume has two objections. First, if the lender is an enemy, towards whom we feel no benevolence, there would be no motivation to return the money, yet clearly people are motivated to do so even under such circumstances. Second, it may not be in the lender's interest to return the money. He may be "a profligate debauchee, and wou'd rather receive harm than benefit from large possessions"(p. 482).

Hume's conclusion is that it would seem "we have naturally no real or universal motive for observing the laws of equity, but the very equity and merit of that observance"(p. 483). But, as he has already shown, regard for the virtue of an action cannot be an original motivation. The only solution is to "allow, that the sense of justice and injustice is not deriv'd from nature, but arises artifi-

cially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions"(p. 483). It is only when considered within a system of conventional rules and practices that a motivation for just actions can be discovered. To see how the motivation arises, it will be necessary to examine Hume's explanation of the origins of justice.[29]

The origins of society cannot be attributed to people's recognition of its benefits, for people would have no means of discovering such benefits without experience. But, even without the recognition of its benefits, the formation of society is ensured by the "natural appetite betwixt the sexes". Once a rudimentary society is established, its members will recognize the benefits that accrue: society increases the power, ability and security of its members. Experience will also make clear that certain "outward circumstances" and man's "natural temper" hinder the preservation of society. The scarcity of goods and instability of their possession combined with man's natural self-interest and biased affections inevitably lead to conflicts. Man's natural temper cannot be changed, but it can be redirected.

> There is no passion ... capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. Now this alteration must necessarily take place upon the least reflection; since 'tis evident, that the passion is much better satisfy'd by its restraint than by its liberty....(p. 492)

Recognizing that their own interests and the interest of their friends and loved ones are better satisfied within society than without it, people are led to check their natural temper.

Given man's natural acquisitiveness, biased affections and the scarcity of goods, the major impediment to maintaining society will be the instability of possessions. If society is to be preserved this situation must be remedied. The remedy is supplied by artifice.

> When men, from their early education in society, have become sensible of the infinite advantages that result from it ... and when they have observ'd that the principal disturbance in society arises from those goods, which we call external, and from their looseness and easy transition from one person to another, they must seek a remedy, by putting these goods, as far as possible, on the same footing with the fix'd and constant advantages of the mind and body.(p. 489)

The remedy consists in establishing a general rule, which Hume describes as "a convention enter'd into by all members of society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave everyone in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry"(p. 489). This convention for stabilizing possessions creates property, which is "nothing but those goods, whose constant possession is establish'd by the laws of soci-

ety"(p. 491). Justice consists, at least in part, in abiding by such laws.[30]

Hume stresses that the agreement to abide by the rules of justice is not based on a promise. "It is only a general sense of common interest, which inclines them to regulate their conduct by certain rules"(p. 490). Promises arise in the same manner as the rules for stabilizing property. Both are the product of a convention, which "arises gradually, and acquires force by slow progression, and by our repeated experiences of the inconveniences of transgressing it"(p. 490).

As noted above, there are no natural motivations to be just. I may have a motivation to refrain from taking another's possessions under certain circumstances--for instance, when it would be dangerous to myself or when I have some particular affection for the other person. But I have no natural motive for restraining myself in all circumstances. Within a conventional order of society such a motive is supplied. The <u>original</u> motive for observing the rules of justice is simply enlightened self-interest. I can best satisfy my own interest within society; it is thus in my interest to abide by the conventions developed for preserving society. This is what Hume refers to as the "natural obligation to justice"(p. 498). We ought to observe the rules, if we want to preserve society, and thus foster our own best interests. The 'ought' here is purely

prudential.

But, according to Hume, natural obligation is merely the original motivation to justice. Once society has grown and conventions have become firmly established, people are no longer motivated by natural obligation, or regard to self-interest, but by moral obligation, or regard to virtue. Within a conventional order an act of injustice will be seen as "prejudicial to human society, and pernicious to everyone that approaches the person guilty of it"(p. 499). This arouses our displeasure, and "as every thing, which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey, is call'd Vice", injustice elicits our moral disapproval. It is only within a conventional order that a just character will always appear useful or agreeable from an objective viewpoint, and it is these qualities that give rise to moral approval.

The general rule for stabilizing possessions is worked out over time by our experience of its advantages and the disadvantages of transgressing it. But the rule itself is much too general to guide us in particular cases.

> Tho' the establishment of the rule, concerning the stability of possession, be not only useful, but even absolutely necessary to human society, it can never serve to any purpose, while it remains in such general terms. Some method must be shown, by which we may distinguish what particular goods are to be assign'd to each particular person, while the

> rest of mankind are excluded from their possession and enjoyment.(p. 501-502)

We must determine some particular means for applying the rule. Ideally, it would seem best if "every one were possess'd of what is most suitable to him, and proper for his use..."(p. 502). Thus, we might be tempted to believe that the best way to stabilize possessions is according to a principle of utility, assigning to each person those goods which would be most useful or advantageous either to the person himself or to society. However agreeable such a scheme may appear in theory, it is not acceptable in practice.

> Besides, that this relation of fitness may be common to several at once, 'tis liable to so many controversies, and men are so partial and passionate in judging of these controversies, that such a rule wou'd be absolutely incompatible with the peace of human society.(p. 502)

Following such a rule would introduce an endless source of controversy and disagreement. Consider a simple example. Is an apple orchard more useful or advantageous to an expert fruit grower or to an impoverished family?--To someone disabled and unable to till the soil or to a vegetarian whose food sources are more limited than others? A rule requiring that such decisions be made for every case would be a source of perpetual dispute, and would thus undermine the original purpose for introducing a rule that would

stabilize possessions.

Rather than pursuing such theoretical solutions to the problem, Hume examines actual practice.[31] He discovers five rules by which people actually assign property. These rules are succinctly summed up in the following account of David Miller:

> (1) Possession: A person shall have the right to whatever objects he currently holds in his possession.
>
> (2) Occupation: A person shall have a right to whatever objects he possesses first, i.e. prior to other persons.
>
> (3) Prescription: A person shall have a right to whatever objects he has held over an extensive period of time.
>
> (4) Accession: A person shall have a right to whatever is 'intimately' connected with objects he already owns (e.g. the fruits of his trees, the offspring of his cattle).
>
> (5) Succession: A person shall have a right to objects owned by his close relatives upon their death.[32]

The application of the first rule, present possession, is limited to the initial formation of society. Once society is established the observance of it would not only cease to stabilize possessions, it would actively promote destabilization.

These five rules, though more determinate than the rule that property must be stable, are still not determinate

enough to settle all controversies. Two types of problems are likely to arise. First, there will be questions such as "What should be counted as first possession?" and "How long must an object be possessed before it becomes rightful property?" Second, there is the possibility that the rules will conflict. Both problems are resolved by an even more determinate set of general rules--municiple laws.

Hume claims that the origin of the rules for assigning property is not reason, but the imagination. The imagination has a "natural propensity to join relations, especially resembling ones..."(p. 509). We ascribe property relations according to the "natural union betwixt the ideas of a person and that of an object..."(p. 510). This natural union is the result of our observation of a natural relation, primarily contiguity and cause and effect. Accession, for instance, is based on both the contiguity between person and object and cause and effect between objects.

If the rules for assigning property are the product of the imagination, what is their claim to legitimate authority? They are not based on reason, but only on "the more frivolous properties of our thought and conception"(p. 504). Thus, they appear to be entirely arbitrary. Hume's reply is that reason cannot supply any workable principles for assigning property. The type of principles supplied by reason are not simply impractical; they are self-defeating. They reintroduce the sort of destabilizing influences that the

rule for stabilizing property is designed to eliminate.

The imagination can and does supply workable principles. This, according to Hume, is a simple matter of fact. His five rules are taken from actual practice. Hume explains this fact by appealing to "known properties of human nature"--our natural propensity to join relations. Because the rules are the product of a natural propensity, they will immediately occur to everyone as the "most natural expedient" and people will "easily acquiese in this expedient" and "naturally agree in preferring it"(p. 503-504). If we reject these naturally formed rules because they are not the product of reason, we are left with no way of stabilizing possessions and this undermines our effort to maintain society.

In discussing the influencing motives of the will, Hume claims that we are unreasonable when "in exerting any passion in action, we chuse means insufficient for the design'd end..."(p. 416). In his discussion of the above rules, he argues that reason is incapable of providing principles that achieve our desired end--stabilizing possessions. The paradoxical conclusion is that it would be unreasonable to employ our reason. To achieve our end we must grant authority to custom.

There are a number of striking parallels between Hume's argument here and his Book I argument concerning the role of

custom in judgment.[33] Both arguments are concerned with showing the limits of reason. In Book I, Hume argues that reason does not and cannot support causal inferences. Causal inference is based on the imagination, or custom. Reason loses its title to grant or deny authority to custom because reason, when consistently pursued, is self-destructive. If we allow that only judgments based on reason have legitimate authority, then we must conclude that no judgments have legitimate authority. But reason gains its title by its claim to lead to truth. If following reason would undermine all judgments, then it clearly thwarts its own aim; it cannot lead to true judgment if it undermines all judgment.

Similarly, reason does not and cannot provide principles for property distribution. These rules are based on the imagination, or custom in the form of convention. Here too reason loses its title to grant or deny authority to these conventions because rational principles are self-defeating. Attempts to assign property according to rational principles undermines the purpose of the rules, which is to maintain "peace and order" in society.

In both cases the limits of reason are revealed by its tendency to undermine its own end. This tendency can be arrested only by granting authority to custom. If we were entirely consistent in following reason and rejecting custom, we would undermine all judgment and belief. Likewise, if we were to follow only rational principles in property

distribution and reject convention or custom-derived rules, we would undermine the social order. To achieve the aim of reason we must limit reason and acknowledge custom.

Another important parallel between Hume's account of the general rules of judgment and the general rules of justice is that in both cases general rules can be seen as natural propensities correcting natural propensities. In his discussion of judgments, Hume notes that the unphilosophical probabilities are the result of certain natural propensities of the imagination. We correct judgments formed according to unphilosophical probabilities by following general rules. But these general rules are the product of the same propensities of the imagination as the unphilosophical probabilities. Thus we correct our judgments by a "new direction of the very same principle"(p. 150).

There are also certain natural propensities of the passions. "In the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confin'd to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintances; and 'tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons"(p. 488). Our self-interest and biased affection lead us astray in our behavior just as our natural propensities of the imagination lead us astray in our judgment. The self-interested passion can only be corrected by redirecting the same passion.

'Tis certain, that no affection of the

> human mind has both sufficient force, and proper direction to counter-ballance the love of gain.... There is no passion, therefore, capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction.(p. 492)

This alteration of direction is achieved by general rules. "'Tis by establishing the rule for the stability of possession, that this passion restrains itself..."(p. 492-93).

Although Hume claims that the redirecting of self-interest "must necessarily take place upon the least reflection"(p. 492) and that "nature provides a remedy in the judgment or understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections"(p. 484), it is clear that he does not consider the formation of the general rules of justice as a conscious reflective process. The rules are the result of "a progress of the sentiments" that is "natural and even necessary"(p. 500). Given time and experience, the passion of self-interest is self-correcting. Thus the rule that property must remain stable "arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it"(p. 490).

The general rules of judgment arise in a similar manner. We do not reflect on the history of our past judgments, weighing successes and failures and consciously develop rules to avoid failures. The modification of belief

and correction of certain natural propensities is the natural effect of certain occurrences in our past experience--false judgments. General rules arise gradually and unreflectively as we experience the "inconveniences" of false judgments.

NOTES

[1] Hume points out that, while it follows that an object that never exercises a power cannot, philosophically speaking, be said to have such a power, "'tis certain it is not the philosophy of our passions; but that many things operate upon them by means of the idea and supposition of power, independent of its actual exercise"(p. 311-12).

[2] It is important to keep in mind that pleasure and pain are not themselves passions. Pleasure and pain are original impressions. Passions are secondary impressions or impressions of reflection.

[3] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," ed. John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 6.

[4] Ibid., p. 7.

[5] Ibid.

[6] What Hume here calls the "sentiment of beauty" is the calm passion called the "sense of beauty" in the Treatise.

[7] "Standard of Taste", p. 11.

[8] Ibid., p. 9. The scope of this passage clearly includes more than aesthetic judgments. In the Treatise, Hume makes the same point about both the passions and the moral sentiments. Discussing the passions, Hume claims:

> "We may ... make it a greater question, whether the causes that produce the passions, be as natural as the object, to which it is directed, and whether all the vast variety proceeds from caprice or from the constitution of the mind. This doubt we shall soon remove, if we cast our eye upon human nature, and consider that in all nations and all ages, the same objects still give rise to pride and humility..."(pp. 280-81).

Discussing moral sentiments, Hume claims:

> "When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it"(p. 469).

[9] Ibid., p. 3. The distinction between subjective evaluation as a expression of individual preference and objective evaluation based on certain objective qualities in objects is central to Hume's moral theory; it serves as a basis for his claim that a moral judgment must be made from a "general point of view". Hume's awareness of the importance of correct use of evaluative language is evident in the following passage from the Treatise:

> "In general, all sentiments of praise or blame are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable.... Such corrections are common with regard to all the senses; and indeed 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation"(p. 582).

[10] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[11] Ibid., p. 13. Hume is here making essentially the same point made in a previously quoted passage from the Treatise (pp. 293-94). A person "full-grown and of the same nature as ourselves" but totally inexperienced would not know the proper degree of passion he "ought to assign" to any object. It is only by custom and experience that we learn to "settle the just value of every thing".

[12] Ibid., p. 14. The same view is expressed repeatedly in the Treatise. Cf. pp. 291,303,323,372,389,

390,593.

[13] Ibid., p. 15. For similar passages regarding the proper evaluative viewpoint see Treatise, p. 472 and pp. 602-603.

[14] Ibid., p. 16.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 7.

[17] Thomas Hearn, "General Rules and Moral Sentiments in Hume's Treatise," Review of Metaphysics 30 (1976), p. 60.

[18] Ibid., p. 61.

[19] Ibid., p. 62.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 63.

[22] Ibid.

[23] This failing is the source of a fundamental problem in Hearn's main thesis. Hearn tries to argue that Hume's moral sentiments are attitudes as opposed to emotions. Hearn characterizes an attitude as "highly rational, in the sense that it presupposes a certain conception of an object. One can only have attitudes where certain beliefs concerning the objects ... are involved"(p. 63). Emotions, on the other hand, "can be experienced in the context of few or no beliefs"(p. 63). Attitudes are "within our control", whereas "emotions are relatively beyond our control"(p. 68). Even a cursory examination of Hume's view of the relationship between passions and judgment reveals that this sort of distinction between emotions and attitudes would be unacceptable to Hume. Even the direct violent passions such as anger or fear depend on a certain conception of objects and require a context of belief. Such 'emotions' are within our control to the extent that our belief is within our control. One might argue that, on Hume's view, belief is not within our control, but this will then present an equal problem for Hearn's account of an attitude.

[24] Hearn, p. 62.

[25] Pall S. Ardal, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1966), p. 94.

[26] Hearn, p. 63.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Although he argues that a regard for the virtue of an action cannot be the original motive for that action, Hume acknowledges that a sense of duty can become a motive:

> "I ask, What reason or motive have I to restore the money? It will, perhaps, be said, that my regard to justice, and abhorance of villainy and knavery, are sufficient reasons ... if I have the least grain of honesty, or sense of duty and obligation. And this answer, no doubt, is just and satisfactory to man in his civilized state, and when train'd up according to a certain discipline and education. But in his rude and more natural condition, if you are pleas'd to call such a condition natural, this answer wou'd be rejected as perfectly unintelligible"(p. 479-480).

[29] Presumably, in explaining the origins of justice, Hume means to offer a causal hypothesis. He is arguing from effects--our actual rules and practices--to causes.

[30] Hume's notion of justice clearly encompasses much more than the mere observance of property rights. Justice, according to Hume, is the observance of the conventional rules and practices for the preservation of society. This explains why he includes sections on allegiance to government, the laws of nations, and even chastity and modesty in his discussion of justice and injustice.

[31] In the second Enquiry, Hume examines and criticizes two other theoretical solutions: distribution according to individual merit and equal distribution. He argues that both solutions are self-defeating. His objection to individual merit is the same as his objection to utility:

> "So great is the uncertainty of merit, both from its natural obscurity, and from the self-conceit of each individual, that no determinate rule of conduct would ever result from it; and the total dissolution of society must be the imme-

diate consequence" Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised with notes by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 193.

Equal distribution, Hume admits, is somewhat more plausible and has even been practiced "at least in an imperfect degree, in some republics; particularly that of Sparta...." Yet, Hume continues:

> "Historians, and even common sense, may inform us, that however specious these ideas of perfect equality may seem, they are really, at bottom, impracticable; and were they not so, would be extremely pernicious to human society. Render possessions ever so equal, men's different degrees of art, care, and industry will immediately break that equality. Or if you check these virtues, you reduce society to the most extreme indigence; and instead of preventing want and beggary in a few, render it unavoidable to the whole community. The most rigorous inquisition too is requisite to watch every inequality ... and the most severe jurisdiction, to punish and redress it .... So much authority must soon degenerate into tyranny and be exerted with great partialities..."(p. 194)

[32] David Miller, Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 67.

[33] Hume's Book I argument is discussed in Chapter III.

C H A P T E R V I

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have tried to present a thorough account of the role of general rules in Hume's philosophy as presented in the Treatise. This task has often required examining certain of Hume's doctrines and arguments in great detail. Such detailed analysis was necessary, not only for understanding how general rules function, but, also, for appreciating their importance to major areas of Hume's philosophy. As necessary as a detailed analysis may be, it is, I think, most profitable when combined with a more general view. Thus, in this chapter, I shall review the major conclusions of the previous chapters in light of their relevance to certain general features of Hume's thought.

One important aspect of Hume's philosophy is his naturalism, and the considerations in Chapters I and II reveal the crucial role of general rules in this regard. Inasmuch as there are substantial differences among commentators concerning the nature of Hume's naturalism, it is important to be clear on my use of the term. I use "naturalism" in a loose but limited sense meant to include two features of Hume's thought: (1) his expressed intention of employing "experimental reasoning" in his examination of human

nature, and (2) his view that all mental phenomena can be explained in terms of psychophysiological principles.

Hume explains his use of experimental method in the introduction to the Treatise:

> It seems to me evident, that the essence of mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations. And tho' we must endeavor to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. (p. xvii)

What we know of the nature of the understanding we know from "observation and experience" alone, and any hypothesis that appeals to mysterious or supernatural agencies and powers or to "refin'd and spiritual" faculties must be rejected as "presumptuous and chimerical".

The second element of Hume's naturalism is closely related to the first. As I pointed out in Chapter I, in eliminating what he considered the suspect faculty of pure intellect, Hume was free to base all the workings of the understanding on purely natural physical processes. Al-

though the physiological aspects of the workings of the mind were clearly of little interest to Hume, his frequent references and allusions to them indicate his concern that his psychological principles be fully explicable at the physiological level. Hume's ideal, although, perhaps, not always realized, was to eliminate as much mystery as possible from the workings of the understanding. If, after rendering all our principles as universal as possible by "tracing up our experiments to the utmost", we can find "no reason for our most general and most refined principles, besides our experience of their reality", we must not be tempted to offer "chimerical" explanations. Instead we must "sit down contented" and be "satisfied with our ignorance", consoling ourselves with the recognition that "this impossibility of explaining ultimate principles...is a defect common to...all the sciences..."(p. xviii).

Although the Malebranchian theory of natural judgments provided Hume with the means of eliminating what he considered chimerical explanations of the operations of the understanding, it needed supplementing if it was to account for the observable fact that we are able to regulate and correct our natural judgments and distinguish between good and bad judgments. Malebranche accounted for these facts by appeal to the faculty of pure intellect, which does not depend on any psychophysiological processes. This sort of appeal was

not possible within Hume's naturalistic framework. Hume needed an account of the correction of natural judgments that was fully explicable within the theory of natural judgments. He achieved this by developing his theory of general rules.

General rules are the natural result of our experience of successes and failures in past judgments. Their formation is explained by exactly the same principles used to explain all our judgments--customs and experience. By employing them we learn to distinguish the "extensive and constant" principles of the imagination form the "capricious and uncertain" principles, and to guide our judgments according to the former rather than the latter.

General rules also play a major role in Hume's conception of reason and rational method. Although he generally confined himself to a particularly narrow usage of the term "reason" (viz., "the discovery of truth and falsehood"), a legitimate question to ask is whether his views display anything akin to a broader and, what we would consider, more natural conception of reason. The answer is clearly, yes. The extensive and constant principles of the imagination are not based on reason in the narrow sense, because we cannot show that such principles are likely to result in true judgments. Yet, throughout the Treatise, Hume insists that wise and judicious reasoners adhere to these principles, while foolish and vulgar reasoners do not. "Wise men" guide

their judgments by properly formed general rules; thus men of "solid sense and long experience" proportion their beliefs to the evidence. The vulgar are guided by irregular principles, which "are observ'd only to take place in weak minds...."(p. 225).

In Chapters III and IV, I explained how Hume's notion of reasonableness is based on his conception of warranted judgment. A judgment is warranted when it is formed according to scientific method--proportioning beliefs to the evidence. We proportion our beliefs to the evidence by employing general rules. Thus, general rules embody the standards of rational judgment. These standards are simply the principles operative in the extensive and constant operations of the understanding. Although Hume acknowledged that we cannot show that these principles will lead to true judgments, he did not conclude that we have no reasonable grounds for preferring them. According to Hume, we can (1) keep our judgments mutually consistent, (2) keep our principles of reasoning mutually consistent, and (3) attain the stability of judgment necessary for coherent experience only by forming judgments according to the extensive and constant principles.

Although Hume believed that we have good grounds for preferring the scientific method of proportioning beliefs to the evidence to the irregular principles of "mere imagina-

tion", he did not place unlimited confidence in the former, nor did he entirely reject the latter. If our inability to show that our fundamental principles of reasoning are likely to result in true judgments is not enough to curb any pretentions of our understanding, then the consideration that it is only a "trivial propensity of the fancy" that prevents the fundamental principles of our thought from undermining all belief should lead us to "always preserve our scepticism".

In Chapters IV and V, I discussed another important area of Hume's philosophy influenced by general rules--his theory of passions and sentiments. Our moral and aesthetic sentiments cannot be true or false; thus, they cannot be considered the product of reason in what Hume understood as the "strict and philosophical sense"(p. 459). But our passions and sentiments depend on our judgments about objects and can be considered reasonable insofar as they arise from warranted judgments. This is another illustration of Hume's broad conception of reasonableness. We cannot show that our matter of fact judgments about objects are likely to be true. Yet, as long as they are warranted by the evidence, Hume considered both the judgments themselves and the sentiments that arise from them reasonable.

In addition to their role in regulating our passions and sentiments by guiding our judgments about objects,

general rules are essential to Hume's theory of value. Moral and aesthetic judgments depend on determining the "just value" of objects. Determining the just value of objects requires more than the ability to accurately distinquish their qualities and calculate their usual effects; it requires developing "general inalterable standards: that are not influenced by "spite or favour". These standards are simply general rules, which we develop by learning to disregard those circumstances that are "peculiar to ourselves" and fixing on "some steady and general point of view". By them we distinguish objective value judgments from subjective expressions of personal taste. It is his theory of general rules that allows Hume to claim that we can make genuine value judgments even when we have no corresponding sentiments, thus preventing his moral theory from degenerating into any sort of pure subjectivism.

Finally, in Chapter V, I have shown that general rules have a substantial role in Hume's political theory. What Hume terms the "laws of nature" are simply general rules of justice developed according to our experience. Our natural propensities toward self-interested behavior and our biased affections combined with the scarcity of goods and instability of possessions are destabilizing influences on society. We recognize from experience that we are best able to satisfy our interests and the interests of those we love

within society. This leads us to form general rules that redirect our propensities to better realize these interests. Once these rules are established within a conventional order and the benefits of adhering to them generally recognized, they elicit moral approval. Transgressions of the rules then become vice, adherence to the rules, virtue.

I have tried to show that general rules play a fundamental role in Hume's philosophy. They are essential to his naturalism, his views on the nature of reason, his skepticism, and his moral, aesthetic and political theories. It was with good cause that Hume spoke of the "mighty influence" of general rules on the actions and understanding.

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APPENDIX

Hume's argument in the section "Of scepticism with regard to reason" has drawn almost universal criticism from Hume commentators.[1] Some typical comments on the argument include "self-refuting", "question-begging", and "sophistical".[2] An examination of the criticisms reveals an almost equally universal tendency to misinterpret Hume's argument. I cannot possibly discuss every criticism here. Instead I shall concentrate on some of the major criticisms and attempt to show that they are not particularly damaging to Hume's argument.

For convenience I will divide these criticisms into three categories. The first are focused on the initial stage of Hume's argument, where he claims that reflection on past errors in judgments reduces our conviction in our present judgments. The second are focused on the next stage of Hume's argument, where he argues that the unreliability of our judgments infects our judgments about our judgments, thereby adding further doubt to our initial belief. Finally, the third group of criticisms accuse Hume of begging the question by ignoring the possibility that some judgments are intuitively certain and thus not subject to any initial doubt.

The first type of criticism is made by Robert Fogelin:

> However certain or uncertain we are about our ability to calculate probabilities, if a proposition has a certain probability, that (tautologically) is the probability it has. For example, in a complex case we may be uncertain whether to assign the probability 1 or 0 to a mathematical proposition, yet this does not affect the first-level assignment, giving it some intermediate value.[3]

Hume would certainly agree that, if a proposition has a certain probability, then that is the probability it has. But, presumably, the probability a proposition has is not necessarily the probability we happen to assign it. We do sometimes make mistakes in our probability assignments and Hume claims that, given this fact, we should not be fully confident in the judgments we make about a proposition's probability. More generally, the problem with this criticism is that it does not address the point Hume is trying to make. To see this it is important to keep in mind Hume's conception of judgment. A judgment is an "act of mind" whereby we form a conception with a particular degree of belief. "By probability [I mean] that evidence,[4] which is still attended with uncertainty"(p. 124). Hume also distinguishes two senses of 'probability': "Probability is of two kinds, either when the object is really in itself uncertain, and to be determin'd by chance, or when, tho' the object be already certain, yet 'tis uncertain to our judgment..."(p. 444).

In claiming that "all knowledge degenerates into probability", Hume is not claiming that mathematical propositions become merely probable. He is claiming that the felt conviction of our mathematical judgments is reduced to some lesser degree of belief. The uncertainty here is in our judgment, not in the object. "In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error"(p. 180). In short, Hume's concern is with epistemic probability. Given the fact that we make errors in our judgments, what degree of conviction should we have in our judgments? To note that "if a proposition has a certain probability, that (tautologically) is the probability it has" is totally irrelevant.

The second type of criticism is represented by Prichard:

> If we judge that the faculty by which we, considering the nature of two and two, judge it to be four is infallible only to the extent of three-quarters, we inevitably are judging as a matter of certainty that two and two is probably four to the extent of three-quarters and we cannot then take further account of the fallibility of our faculties, for we have already taken full account of it.[5]

First of all, this is a misuse of the terms 'fallible' and 'infallible'. A faculty cannot be infallible (incapable of making errors) to the extent of three-quarters. If it is

capable of making errors at all it is, by definition, fallible. Second, Hume would not claim that two and two equalling four is only probable. He would claim that what is only probable is that, when we make a methematical judgment that we believe to be correct, our judgment actually is correct. Finally, when we judge that it is only probable that we correctly judge that two and two equals four, we are inevitably judging this as a "matter of certainty". But Hume's whole point is to question the legitimacy of taking this judgment as certain.

Suppose we accept as fact that all judgments, with the exception of this one, are uncertain. We then have no real problem. We simply take account of this fact when making judgments by modifying our degree of belief or conviction. According to Hume, those who are considered to have good judgment normally operate on the basis of just such a supposition. But, he asks, what possible justification can we have for making the above exception: If we accept the view that the general reliability of our judgments is an important factor to consider in determining a proper degree of conviction, then we must make some sort of evaluation of our judging ability. Yet there appears to be no non-arbitrary way to exclude the judgment involved in this evaluation from the verdict of the evaluation. Passmore correctly characterized this aspect of the problem as fol-

lows:

> This analysis demands that we stop at a certain point (the examination of our faculties) in the estimation of reliabilities, and yet it can provide no explanation why, if we must proceed to that point, we should not for precisely the same reasons continue to a further point, and then again to a further one, with no possibility of ever reaching a point at which we can properly rest.[6]

The third type of criticism accuses Hume of begging the question by failing to consider the possibility of intuitively certain judgments. The criticism is directed at the following passage:

> 'Tis easily possible, by gradually reducing the numbers, to reduce the longest series of addition to the most simple question, which can be form'd, to an addition of two single numbers; and upon this supposition we shall find it impracticable to shew the precise limits of knowledge and of probability, or discover that precise number, at which one ends and the other begins. But knowledge and probability are of such contrary and disagreeing natures, that they cannot well run insensibly into each other, and that because they will not divide, but must be either entirely present, or entirely absent. Besides, if any single addition were certain, every one wou'd be so, and consequently the whole or total sum; unless the whole can be different from its parts.(p. 181)

Fogelin's response is typical of the third type of criticism:

> We can notice that this argument assumes that a long addition can yield only probabiltiy. Then, by a slippery slope argument (run in two directions), Hume argues that this must be true of any addition however simple. The reply, of course, is that this ignores the possibility that our grasp of a simple "proposition concerning numbers" may not involve calculation at all but, instead, an immediate insight. In this way, the fallibility that infects our calculations (and demonstrations) need not touch our intuitive understanding.[7]

I have already argued that Hume does not assume that long addition can yield only probability in the sense Fogelin ascribes to him. There is no uncertainty (probability, in Humels sense) in the object; the uncertainty is in the judgment. So, if an addition has a certain sum, then that is necessarily the sum it has. But, of course, the sum we judge it to have is not necessarily the sum it has. But Fogelin's point can be made without the supposition that Hume thought mathematical propositions only probable. The basic criticism is that Hume ignores the possibility of intuitively certain judgments.

Consider the form of Hume's argument. If each simple addition were certain, then the whole would be certain. The whole is not certain; therefore, it is not true that each simple addition is certain. As one critic has pointed out, this argument cuts both ways:

> If we were to accept a premiss of one of his arguments, namely, that <u>if any sin-</u>

> gle addition were certain, every one wou'd be so, and consequently the whole or total sum we should, ironically enough, have no choice on the evidence at hand but to affirm the antecedent and conclude that he is, despite himself, providing an argument for the infallibility of at least some total sums as opposed to the fallibility of immediate inference per se, as he had intended.[8]

That we sometimes err in long addition simply shows that sometimes the whole is not certain and, thus, sometimes simple additions are not certain. But this does not eliminate the possibility that sometimes simple additions are intuitively certain and that the long additions composed of such intuitively certain simple additions are likewise certain.

The case can be made in a more straightforward way by noting that, although we sometimes make mistakes in simple additions, this does not warrant the conclusion that no simple addition is certain. The defender of intuitive certainty can claim that such errors merely show that in some instances we do not judge with intuitive certainty. Haste or inattention can lead us to judge that 1+1=3, but this does not mean that in more attentive moments we cannot grasp with intuitive certainty that 1+1=2. If, as defenders of intuition claim, this is the actual situation, then it is false that all knowledge "degenerates into probability".

Hume's critics are correct in accusing him of failing to address this possibility. But the assumption that the

proper criterion for establishing he reliability of judgments is experience is in keeping with Hume's basic principle; thus this failing can be easily remedied. There is no necessary connection between feelings of intuitive certainty and correct judgments. Not only is there no necessary connection, but experience proves that there is not even a 'constant conjunction'. People have held (and continue to hold) all manner of false and even absurd judgments to be intuitively certain. Thus, the feeling of intuitive certainty is no guarantee of truth. The extent to which it is an indication of truth is determined entirely by experience. It might well be that judgments in which we feel an intuitive certainty are highly reliable (usually true), in which case we are warranted in being highly confident about them. But this confidence is based on experienced reliability, not on any assumption about the self-certifying nature of intuition.

Whatever decision one makes about the ultimate merits of Hume's argument, this discussion of the criticisms reveals an important point. The aim of the argument is not, as the critics seem to assume, to question or eliminate the distinction between knowledge and probability (however one characterizes this distinction). Hume's aim is to show the limitations of rational method. Although we can show that proportioning beliefs to the evidence is more rational than

other methods of forming beliefs, we cannot, Hume argues, adopt it as a perfectly general principle of reason. What we consider rational methodology at one level of judgment cannot be extended to all levels of judgment without undermining all belief and conviction. The reasonableness of scientific method depends on limiting its scope of application.

NOTES

[1] A major exception to these criticisms is Fred Wilson's article "Hume's Sceptical Argument Against Reason," Hume Studies 9, No. 2 (November 1983): 90-129. Wilson attempts to show that Hume's argument is valid according to probability calculus. But I believe that Wilson's characterization of Hume's argument as structurally identical to the skeptical argument concerning chains of historical testimony is incorrect.

[2] Passmore indicates that Hume's argument is self-refuting in Hume's Intentions, p. 137; Robert Imlay calls it question-begging in his article "Hume's 'Of Scepticism with regard to reason': A Study in Contrasting Themes," Hume Studies 7, No. 2 (November 1981): 124; MacNabb refers to it as "sophistical" in his Encyclopedia of Philosophy article "Hume", ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 4:84.

[3] Fogelin, p. 18.

[4] One should note that, in Hume's usage, "evidence" often refers to the evidence of something, i.e., how evident it is, not to the evidence for something, i.e., what provides proof or support for it.

[5] H.A. Prichard, "Hume" in Knowledge and Perception (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), p. 195.

[6] Passmore, pp. 135-36. Passmore is not as acute in explaining the point of Hume's argument: "The real outcome of Hume's argument is that 'antecedent' scepticism is illogical. The 'reliability of our faculties' cannot be the test of a proposition's probability"(p. 136). As I have repeatedly emphasized, Hume is not assessing the probability of propositions, where this is understood as some property that such 'objects' possess. Furthermore, assuming that Hume's argument is supposed to show that 'antecedent scepticism' is illogical makes complete nonsense out of the entire section. Hume claims that reason can discover no error in the argument and it is this claim that serves as a basis for his skepticism about reason at the end of the section.

[7] Fogelin, p. 15.

[8] Imlay, p. 124.